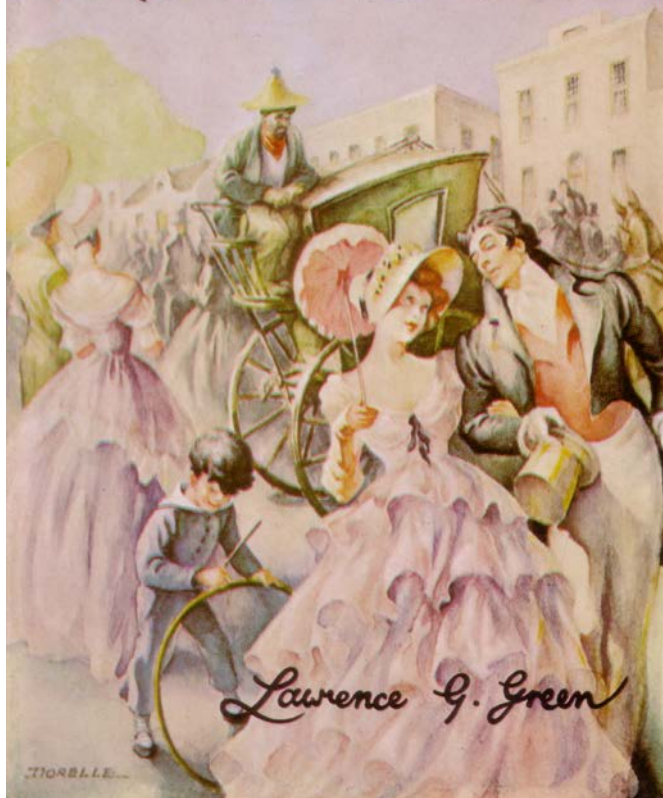


GROW LOVELY, GROWING OLD



Lawrence G. Green

TIONBILLE...

These characters, and
many more, appear in
the pages of

"GROW LOVELY,
GROWING OLD"



Aem Cappijl van der Westhuyzen



Dr. James Barry



Malay bride



Mrs. Wilhelmina Kleinomiddt



Japs van Riebeeck



Lady Anne Barnard



Lord Charles Somerset



bridegroom



Michiel Hiddingh



Lord Macartney



"Charlie Chaplin"
(Lawrence Arthur Hollern)



The Coons

G. W. LLOYD BAKER

GROW LOVELY, GROWING OLD

LAWRENCE GREEN

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CHAPTER 1

SHAKE HANDS WITH YESTERDAY

*Through the torn hulk the dashing waves shall roar,
The shattered wrecks shall blacken all my shore;
Themselves escaped, despoiled by savage hands,
Shall naked wander o'er the burning sands.*

Camoens. The "Lusiad"

HE WAS nearing the century, a lean man, tranquil as the sea. You have to be lean, with a peaceful mind, to live so long. I found him on the stoep of his wooden shack, warming his bones in the morning sun with a calm Table Bay before him. It is seldom now that I meet a man nearly twice my age, but there it was and he called me *nefie*.

No doubt he was lonely and liked talking about the old days. What else was there for him but memories and the sun, and a *sopie* in the evening? But for me it was a rich experience. In such company I feel that I am shaking hands with yesterday. Such men, when I can find them, open the doors along Time's passages. They give me the past; not the past of the printed word but the feel of the living, bygone years.

In that mood I walked to the dune where I take my reveries. The dune was not high enough for my thoughts, and so at blaze of noon I found myself on the summit of Blaauwberg, looking out over a wider scene. High noon, half-way through the day, half-way through the century ... with the old half-way house of the oceans across the water. How fast the mind works on an apple instead of a full Sunday lunch, and with this scene to feed upon. Now at last I realize how few are the lifetimes that span the centuries between the Cape we know and Van Riebeeck's mud fort.

Austere though it may be on the grey days, and whipped by the sand in summer, this coast stretched out below Blaauwberg hill is one that appeals to me more than any other beach in the world. Yes, I have seen many beaches, from teeming Coney Island to the sweltering shore at Lavinia outside Colombo, where I sailed with the fishermen in an outrigger canoe. I have loafed under a sun umbrella on Copacabana beach at Rio; landed through the surf at lonely Tristan; and all round Africa I have been drawn to the edge of the sea. Famous beaches, remote beaches, I enjoyed most of them and found something of interest everywhere. But not one of them has given me so much inspiration as Blaauwberg beach. Nowhere else does the surf break with the sound of the Blaauwberg surf, or the wind bring me such stirring tales.

Today the blue mountain mass over the bay is my backcloth for the scenes of the centuries. Who were the earliest navigators to sight Table Mountain against the sky? Some say the Phoenicians first rounded the Cape, but I doubt it even as Herodotus, who related the legend, doubted it. I can imagine Chinese junks coming this way long before Diaz, but not the Carthaginian galleys.

Strange that the Portuguese never set up an outpost on these wild shores. Here they left nothing but their dead, with cairns over them – and a little bronze cannon that was carried inland by Bushmen and found centuries later in a cave.

Other navigators carved names and dates on trees and stones. No white man remained on shore for more than a few days, however, until early in the seventeenth century. Then came the whale hunters, who camped for months, and the ill-fated convicts who failed to carry out their orders to make a garden for the English East India Company. It should have been a paradise for adventurers, that unspoilt Table Bay, with herds of eland close to the shore and hippo in every vlei. Yet the seventeenth century was almost half gone before the *Haarlem* wreck proved that white men could live well, and on good terms with the Hottentots, beside this southern bay.

At first those shipwrecked Hollanders called it the “end of the world.” They made a sand fort; but they were a gloomy company. When spring came, and the wild flowers, they were more cheerful and ate with relish the vegetables they had grown. For a whole year they lived like Robinson Crusoe’s where the city now stands.

It is not difficult to fix the scene of the shipwreck. The *Haarlem* was driven ashore “within a musket-shot” of the present Milnerton beach. A later *Haarlem*, with a cargo of china, was lost at the Salt River mouth, and these two wrecks have often been confused. The first *Haarlem* – *Nieuw Haarlem* was her full name – carried sugar and spices; and it is recorded that the stench of the rotting peppercorns was so devastating that some of the tough seamen fainted, and rats and mice died. They had to camp at a distance and drag what they salvaged for miles through heavy sand.

On the whole, however, it was a holiday for men accustomed to the hardships of the sea. Then twelve Dutch ships sailed into Table Bay homeward bound. Among those who landed to see the camp of the Crusoe’s was a young ship’s surgeon. He treated the sick and heard all the tales of the castaways when they embarked and sailed back to Holland with him. But

Jan van Riebeeck little knew that four years later he would be building the first Cape settlement from the *Haarlem's* timbers.

SOMEONE WHO rode up the beach early this century told me that he counted forty wrecks between the Castle and Melkbosch Strand. That was a ride to remember. I would be prepared to walk the distance if there was one wreck on the beach.

Melkbosch Strand, said my friend the horseman, was no more than a homestead at the time of that ride. I wish that I could have been with him; for I am always bewitched by a place within sight of a city, yet which contrives to retain its character, and a measure of isolation, despite the passing of the years and the danger of change.

On old maps Melkbosch Strand appears as Losperd's Bay. One authority on place-names suggests that a farmer went there in search of a runaway horse. Though I cannot contradict him, I think it is far more likely that a member of the old Loubser family, of Swiss origin, gave his name to the bay. There was a Loubser farming at Salt River before the end of the seventeenth century. What more natural than that he should drive his cattle that short way up the coast in search of grazing? Losper, of course, is a corruption of

Loubser, and from there to Losperd's Bay calls for no strain on the imagination.

Looking down on Melkbosch from my hilltop, I have no hesitation in picturing the whole past of that pleasant village. I remember that the skull of a Strandloper was found there, well preserved by the sand. Certainly it was a place where primitive man dug up the white mussels between the tidemarks, caught fish when he could, and feasted on dead seals and even dead whales.

They left burnt stones, bone awls, ostrich eggshell beads and other implements round their old camps. Some say that from a height you can still discern little patches in the bush where the Strandlopers cultivated their dagga. Tusks of elephants have emerged from these dunes, and perhaps the hungry Strandlopers had a taste of the mighty flesh.

Those ancient beachcombers ranked low in the human scale, and no one has yet been able to place them accurately. They may have been Bushmen who preferred the beaches; or beach-roaming forerunners of the Bushmen. I know this; the Strandlopers had knowledge which I do not possess. They could live on these sands, whereas if I were pushed out on to Blaauwberg

beach tomorrow, empty-handed and clad in skins, the end would not be far off. A miserable end it would be, for civilized man starves easily.

Fish, you say? Just watch the modern fisherman with his steel rod and nylon cord. He casts into the surf again and again until you marvel at his patience. Not even the best of them would care to rely on their catches.

Now study this bone shaft found in a Strandloper midden on Blaauwberg beach. It is one-eighth of an inch in diameter, four inches long, sharpened at both ends and ringed in the middle. The late Dr. Peringuey of the South African Museum could make nothing of it until he received a similar bone implement from the Pacific: Only when he read the label did he realize that primitive men thousands of miles apart had devised similar fish-hooks.

These men knew how to make clay pots and colour them with magnetic iron sand. They preyed not only on the large animals, but regarded locusts as delicacies. They burrowed for roots and gathered wild melons. They survived all the vicissitudes of life on the open shore until civilized man arrived and drove them into territory so barren that even the Strandlopers failed to discover enough food.

Then carne Loubser with his cattle, hardly disturbing the great hush of the centuries. Losperd's Bay had to wait until 1806 for the one great drama ever

known there – an event which future historians will recognize as a turning point of more significance than it has been given up to now. It was at Losperd's Bay that Major-General Sir David Baird landed with his troops and took the Cape for Britain. That was the Battle of Blaauwberg you heard about at school, but they did not tell you that the troops came through the surf at Losperd's Bay.

In my days at school they made history a term of reproach and a cruel strain on a young memory. Years afterwards I realized that history is an inheritance from which there is no escape; something which explains the present and points inevitably to the future. In my schooldays it was simply a matter of names and dates.

No one told me that Janssens, a kindly and cultured man, was a poor general. If he had opposed the landing at Losperd's Bay, there might never have been a Second British Occupation of the Cape! And he should have known that the British would land there; the ships lay at anchor off Losperd's Bay for days before the attack. Losperd's Bay, moreover, was the only point on the coastline near Cape Town offering some protection from the surf, yet beyond the range of the Castle guns.

All that Janssens did was to post a few sharpshooters in the dunes. They killed one man and wounded four as the Highland Brigade came on shore. Admiral Popham had sacrificed a light transport brig, a shallow-draught vessel which was beached to form a breakwater. In spite of this shelter, one boatload of men of the 93rd Regiment capsized, and thirty-six were drowned. What havoc Janssen's could have created if he had covered the beach with his artillery! As it was, Baird landed more than four thousand men with howitzers and field-pieces unopposed.

Even then the British troops suffered agonies of thirst, and a few died of thirst. Waterless sand was the main enemy. Baird climbed to this hilltop where I am standing, dislodged the Dutch scouts, and saw the main body of Janssen's army drawn up near the foot of Blaauwberg – a superior army of five thousand men, mainly cavalry, paraded in two lines with their cannon hitched to horses. A battle was a neat business in those days, and a war artist could include every detail within the frame of his canvas.

When I was at school they did not show me the *London Gazette* of February 28, 1806. I found that for myself and read Baird's own description of the battle. He reported that his troops advanced “under a very heavy fire of round shot, grape and musketry”. Janssen's retreated, but Baird had

difficulty in following him. “The deep, heavy, arid land and burning sun had nearly exhausted our gallant fellows in the moment of victory,” declared Baird. When the commandant of the Cape Town garrison came out under the white flag to meet Baird, the British troops were still thirsty, and starving.

At school, no one told me that after the battle a Koeberg farmer named Jan Jacob Mostert put in a claim for 685 rix-dollars. British soldiers passed over his farm like a swarm of locusts. “Notwithstanding the generous treatment on the side of the officers trying to keep their men under good discipline,” lamented Mr. Mostert, “they ruined and partly carried away the greatest part of my furniture, utensils and poultry.”

Was there ever a war without looting? I was told at school that the Battle of Blaauwberg was no more than a skirmish. Viewing the battlefield from the Blaauwberg summit today, nearly a century and a half afterwards, I have decided that I would rather be here now, munching my apple, than down on the thirsty plain long ago among the “round shot and grape”.

Before this violent interlude I was imagining, to my own satisfaction, the Melkbosch Strand centuries. In the Dutch times the shell gatherers must have come this way. Soon after Van Riebeeck built his houses it became

obvious that the bricks made at the Cape would not stand up to north-west gales. Plaster was essential, and luckily there was plenty of black mussel shell to supply the lime. So they loaded their carts and fired their kilns, built the Castle and the first homes.

This is an industry that has survived the centuries. You can still see a few of the old, circular, white-washed kilns smoking away lustily when the south-easter blows; the blue-black shells turning at last to soft white ash. These kilns have a typical aroma. In summer the lime smoke, the sand, the wind and the salt ocean air all combine in an odour which is the essence of the Table Bay beaches, not at all unpleasant, far healthier than city smells.

Also in the Dutch times came the pioneer farmers, close to the settlement, yet conscious that they were tilling virgin soil from which the last of the wild beasts had not yet departed. All round me are the oldest wheat lands in Southern Africa. I am also thinking of the old *melkboer*, Joachim Reyneker, who settled near the foot of this hill late in the eighteenth century and watered the Company's oxen when the wagons toiled up the sandy track to far Saldanha. That was part of the bargain. He could graze his cattle on condition that he looked after the dam.

Melkbosch was bare veld at the time of the British landing, but later that year a portion of freehold ground was granted to one C. P. Brand. No doubt many a shooting party assembled on the beach with a sheep for their braaivleis, a vaatjie of wine and a sack of sweet potatoes for the embers. No doubt they caught crawfish there, and galjoen in the surf, long before the first thatched house was built near the sheltered bay. That was the Melkbosch homestead, vanished now, though many remember it on the site of the present hotel.

Inland a little way lived the Kotze family. They had Blaauwberg farm at the time of the battle; it is close to Melkbosch and some miles from Blaauwberg Strand. Mr. J. J. Kotze, grandfather of the judge (the late Sir John Kotze) raised grain, cattle and horses. Latrobe visited him there in 1810 and wrote: "His house is one of the best in the country and elegant in its arrangements and furniture." Lord Charles Somerset hunted over it, and conversed in French with the Kotzes, who spoke no English.

Sir John Kotze, who lived to ninety, used to tell many stories of his grandfather. Once a party of convicts stole a boat, escaped from Robben Island, and were reported to have landed near Melkbosch. Grandfather Kotze and his foreman Brink went out armed, on horseback. They rounded up a dozen

convicts, marched them to the farmhouse, and sent a galloper to Cape Town for an escort. The farm was seventeen miles from town, a cart journey of four hours.

Nearly all last century there was just the homestead above Melkbosch beach. That lean old man I was telling you about – Oom Cappy van der Westhuysen is his name – first went there as a youth. That takes you back to the eighteen-seventies. Oom Cappy told me that three brothers owned the farm. They went in for horses and fishing. Although they lived within sight of Cape Town, they were so isolated that they might have been hundreds of miles away.

“But those were much happier times,” declared Oom Cappy, with the intense wistfulness of the lonely and the aged. “I tell you, they were jolly people who camped at the seaside. They ate well, and drank a *sopie* and danced ... everything was peaceful and everything was much more friendly. Neighbours visited one another. There was no thieving.”

Oom Cappy walked south from Melkbosch straight down the beach when he had to go to town, and walked back with his parcels – six hours each way. There was just one canteen at Salt River, and a windmill at Woodstock. Butter cost four pence a pound, and he could buy a whole sheep for six shillings. Yes, for Oom Cappy, and for many others, those were happier times.

When he was a very young man, Oom Cappy met an old man who had lost all his front teeth. “You know how he lost them? ” asked Oom Cappy. “A cannon ball took his teeth out. That was the time when the English landed here, just in front of where my house stands, and fought with Janssens. That cannon ball nearly took his head off, but he just lost his teeth.”

Oom Cappy¹ pondered for a moment. “It is a very difficult thing to live to be a hundred,” he went on. “I was my own doctor. My mother lived to over ninety. But the years were peaceful, and that is what you need if you want to be a hundred.”

Do not imagine, however, that Oom Cappy has spent his whole life on this beach which has been so quiet since the battle. He is an old adventurer, sitting on his Melkbosch stoep with strange memories. Born at Malmesbury, he went to sea as a boy and became skipper of the sailing cutter *Berg River* – hence the nickname “Cappy”. He was in South-West Africa before the Germans colonized the territory, and he knew Witbooi and other old Hottentot chiefs.

During one winter gale in 1884 the *Berg River* was blown a thousand miles out of her course. “Twenty days we were at sea, with the wind blowing

¹ Oom Cappy found himself in hospital for the first time in his life in February, 1951. He slipped and broke his leg while feeding his fowls.

stronger and stronger,” recalled Oom Cappy. “We were so tired of eating ship's biscuits. But when I got back I went to the first pub in Dock Road and there I had a hot toddy ... more than one hot toddy.”

Oom Cappy has been a farmer, a storekeeper in Namaqualand, and a carpenter on the railways. He helped to lay the first railway tracks to Bulawayo and Beira. Then he returned to the Cape and built houses. “You can see my houses all the way from Melkbosch to Moorreesburg,” says Oom Cappy proudly.

He dug a well in the grounds of his cottage not long ago, and lined it with cement bricks he had made himself. “If I don't do a little work, I have no appetite, and if I don't eat I can't sleep,” declares Oom Cappy.

Oom Cappy had one ambition many years ago. His ancestors came from Friesland, and he saved the money for a voyage to the land of dykes and waterways. War in 1914 Put an end to his plans. He has been married twice and he has four children, but all his friends have gone. “I see their children sometimes, but there is no one left from my young days,” says Oom Cappy. “Sometimes I think it is not right to live so long.”

Melkbosch, as Oom Cappy first knew it, remained unchanged for decade after decade. New Year always brought the wagons. At intervals of years

there would be a tragedy, when a farmer rode his horse into the surf and was swept away; or when bathers were carried off by the swift northward current.

Otherwise it was peaceful there, within sight of Table Mountain. Cutters anchored in the bay and loaded grain. In 1906 there was talk of building a railway and a jetty at Melkbosch to ship the manganese ore that was being mined in the mountains inland. Mr. William Brough petitioned Parliament and gained sanction for the scheme. Then the manganese boom collapsed, and Melkbosch remains without a jetty to this day.

It was not until 1922 that the land round Melkbosch Strand was surveyed and cut up into building plots. Soon afterwards the present resort began to take shape, with farmers from Malmesbury and Paarl as the owners of many of the seaside cottages.

There was a sand track to Melkbosch long ago, but this was often blocked by a notorious dune. Many parts of this coastline are menaced by drift sand, and the Forestry Department worked for years between Blaauwberg and Melkbosch to save five hundred acres. The great Melkbosch dune was halted as recently as 1936, after it had been zigzagged with vygies and marram grass and the rooikrantz seeds had germinated. One pleasant change

in the veld that Oom Cappy has noted has been the disappearance of the glaring stretches of sand and the growth of bush. The sand came last century, and this century it has been conquered.

BLAAUWBERG STRAND, as a settlement, is much older than Melkbosch, for the name appears on early eighteenth century maps. I have spoken before of my walks on that long beach.² Beyond the last house, Blaauwberg is still the place that old Dutch Company officials called “the Fish Bays”. The place where, two centuries ago, a group of seventeen rocks was named the “Kamer van Zeventein”, after the Dutch Company's mighty rulers.

Some way further up the beach are the rocks of Kreefte Baai. There is a legend of a treasure ship lost among those rocks; and about twenty years ago two silver coins were found in a crevice. One bore the lion crest of Spain on one side, a horseman in armour on the other, and the date 1673. The other coin revealed the head of Philip IV of Spain. I am always hoping that some freak of weather will uncover something for me when I walk beyond the last house at Blaauwberg Strand.

² See Lawrence Green's *So Few Are Free* for the story of Blaauwberg Strand.

Blaauwberg gives you a detached view of Table Mountain, a sense of aloofness. In the city, the mountain can be oppressive. Here on my dune I can see it as though I have stepped back to sum up a painting. I can study a timeless mountain, a mass without blemishes. Van Riebeeck was up there, seeking timber and finding dates carved on trees – 1604, 1620, 1622 – dates, but no names. Wouter Schouten went up looking for a lake with fish; and he left his name on a rock in Platteklip Gorge. According to Nicolaus de Graaff in 1679, a party of sailors climbed by the same easy route and three of them were torn to pieces by lions or leopards. Father Tachard, the priest, had to dodge stones rolled down towards him by angry baboons.

There was Mentzel, just two centuries ago, firing his gun to scare the baboons. In camp on the summit that evening he heard the Castle drummers sounding the muster. He and his companions had ham, mutton and rolls for supper. “We wisely omitted to bring wine, as this would make our limbs leaden,” recorded Mentzel. Twenty years later Thunberg admired the red disa on Table Mountain, and reported a blue disa that no botanist has discovered since then. At the same period Sparrman had a narrow escape from being plundered by runaway slaves. Le Vaillant shot and roasted a vulture, and found it nauseating.

Apart from such queer adventures, all those travellers toiled up the mountain with the same feelings of release that the climbers of our own time know. Only in our own time, however, have the corners of this citadel received the expressive names that record so much achievement. Cairn Crag and Arrow Face, Barrier Corner and Black Slab Gully are straightforward enough. So are Wormhole Buttress, Zig-Zag Route and Corridor Crest. Frustration Gorge tells its own story, and Ruminating Crag is no mystery to the mountaineer. But what happened at Desperation Corner? There is magic in names that come out of experience, and Table Mountain is alive with them.³

One of these days or years – in the ordinary course of events – Cape Town will know me no more. I have little envy in my nature, for curiosity is my besetting sin; and if I leave with regret it will be because I still shall be intensely curious about the pattern of life under Table Mountain. For me, all through this century, Cape Town has been the one city of unchanging charm. I have gone away often enough and tested it. Those departures, all

³ Table Mountain climbs, accidents, fires and other episodes are dealt with in a chapter of Lawrence Green's *Tavern of the Seas*.

those returns, taught me to appreciate Cape Town; and really I should not be at all curious about a future which I can imagine clearly enough.

On the far beaches, on the untouched veld, on the old mountain, the Cape will remain much as it has been throughout the centuries. Each season will carry the same message, each year will open with the promise of the pleasures I knew – but only for those who can feel the great web of past and present and future that flutters invisible in the winds against the sun and stars.

CHAPTER 2

AT EARTH'S EXTREMIST END

*We praise the Great Director,
and say with one another,
Augustus's dominion,
nor conquering Alexander,
Nor Caesar's mighty genius,
has ever had the glory
To lay a cornerstone at earth's extremist end.*

Translated from the verses written in 1666 to celebrate the
laying of the Castle foundation stone.

IT SEEMS a long decade since I slept within the Castle walls as command orderly officer, with responsibilities far beyond my meagre military experience. In the morning, I remember, I sat down to breakfast with two senior officers who lived in the Castle mess. There was just one grape-fruit, which was solemnly sliced in two and placed before my seniors. Fortunately for me (a middle-aged lieutenant) there were enough eggs and bacon and coffee to go round.

During that spell of duty I saw corners of the Castle that I had never seen before, and gained a deeper respect for those old stone walls. I wonder how many people

realize that it is sheer luck that the Castle is still in existence? On three occasions last century the Castle was in great danger of demolition. Sir Philip Wodehouse announced the government's intention of doing away with it in 1864, "as an economy measure". Many people regarded the Castle as an eyesore, and there was no outcry. For some reason the vandals shelved the scheme, but it was a narrow escape.

Twenty years later the Imperial Government offered to sell the Castle to the Cape Colony for £83,340, but the offer was refused. (In our own time the Union Government has spent thousands of pounds on the restoration of the Castle's faded glories.) Again in 1886 the military authorities planned to level the Castle to provide room for new barracks. *The Cape Argus* published a letter attacking "this pitiful structure which can be knocked flat in a few hours by a few ordinary guns, which never fired a shot, and which in Europe would be regarded as a third or fourth-class fort".

In a leading article, however, *The Cape Argus* declared: "We pleaded long ago for the preservation of the Town House, ugly and insignificant as it is, simply because we have so few buildings of any age to impress colonists with the idea that the country they live in has a history. We hope that the Castle, whether

it is required for military purposes or not, will always remain to redeem Cape Town from the rawness of most colonial towns.”

Soon afterwards came the dawn of public sentiment with a strong protest by the Afrikaner Bond. Headed by “Onze Jan” Hofmeyr, a deputation appealed to Governor Sir Hercules Robinson. Robinson replied that he had no power to grant their request, but the military had undertaken to preserve the gateway. The old Council Chamber, however, would have to go. Fortunately the Bond members persisted in their efforts, and the Castle remained.

The last attempt to scrap the Castle was made by the railway authorities at the end of last century. They wanted more space for the lines entering Cape Town station, and they were successful in having the Imhoff battery removed. With the battery went historic Imhoff House, a grand little single-storeyed, flat-fronted dwelling with military symbols on the pediment and a garden with vines and figs. Rhodes secured the door and carved teak fanlight from Imhoff House and set them up at Groote Schuur. Today trains run so close to the Castle walls that they pass over the filled-in moat and underground torture chamber; but the treasure house of the Castle itself is safe.

Not many years ago there were people in Cape Town who had seen the Castle walls wetted by spray from Table Bay. The late Sir John Kotze once told me that, as a boy, he watched the great gale of 1865 from the Castle ramparts; and on that day the seas that caused so many wrecks were breaking against the Catzenellenbogen bastion. A brig was carried so high by the combers that her bowsprit dislodged a gun in one of the embrasures. Now the Castle stands more than a thousand yards from the nearest salt water.

The Castle was designed so that the moat could be filled from the sea at high tide. In later years, however, the Capel Sluit served the purpose. The Water Gate or Sally Port facing the sea was the original entrance. It was bricked up in the time of Simon van der Stel, but in the groined ceiling of the archway there remains a neat blue slate keystone engraved with the original Castle plan. Three drawbridges which once crossed the moat have vanished.

Every person, rich or poor, male or female, passing the Castle during the excavation period had to carry one basketful of earth from the moat. Two soldiers were once drowned in the moat as a result of a cloudburst; the water level suddenly rose six feet and they were carried away in the torrent.

Van Riebeeck selected Signal Hill as the site of the Castle, and if he had remained longer at the Cape it would probably have been built there. It was left to others “to lay a cornerstone at earth's extremist end”, and they placed it on the edge of Table Bay.

While the Castle was still being built a shrewd young soldier started a barrack-room argument by pointing out that an enemy on Devil's Peak would be in a position to blow the garrison out of their stronghold. The Governor heard of this unsettling theory, arrested the man, brought him before the Council, and ordered him to prove his words. If he could reach the fortress with a cannon ball he would be set free. Two of the finest cannon were provided for the purpose.

Not a shot reached the Castle, and the young man had to forfeit three months' pay – the cost of the experiment. Nevertheless it was suspected that a more skilful gunner might have fired a longer shot. Later artillery officers realized that the soldier had been right; the Castle was commanded by higher ground, and redoubts and defensive lines were prepared to deal with the oversight.

No hostile cannon ball ever struck the Castle walls, and archivists have been unable to trace a single shot fired in anger from the Castle ramparts. There

was an awkward episode in the seventeenth century, however, when a practical joker loaded a signal cannon with shot while the gunner's back was turned. As a result, the roof of a house was damaged and the angry owner raced to the Castle to demand compensation. The culprit with the exaggerated sense of humour was never found.

The Castle was not, as some believe, the first stone castle built in Africa south of the equator, or the only fortress from which civilization was to spread into the interior. There is a Portuguese castle at Loanda a full century older; one that was seized by the Dutch and held for years. Nor is the Castle in any way unique in design, for Vauban the engineer was fond of this "Bourbon type" of fortress shaped like a five-pointed star. A Dutch fortress in Ceylon is almost a replica.

Some historians doubt whether the Castle is indeed Cape Town's oldest building. It is possible that Rust-en-Vreugde (later the Normal College) may be older; but there are no transfer deeds to prove it, as the house was the Company's property, and no transfer was necessary. Ornamental teak pillars at Rust-en-Vreugde bear a strong resemblance to certain pillars at the Castle; they are true Corinthian pillars, probably carved by the same man; and nowhere else in the Cape is the same workmanship to be found.

The greatness of the Castle, however, rests on the excellence of its interior architecture. It arose on wild shores six thousand miles from Holland at a time when both artisans and materials were scarce; yet so inspiring was the final achievement that no later builder has succeeded in surpassing its grandeur. Search where you will in the modern Union of South Africa – the old Castle, the first large building in this far outpost, is still the finest in the land.

Pieter Dombaer, engineer in charge of the works, had three hundred soldiers and many slaves to carry out his orders. They brought timber from Hout Bay, stone from the mountain quarries, shells for lime from Robben Island; while much woodwork and many cargoes of bricks and tiles came all the way from Holland. Down at the southern end of Africa men toiled at intervals for thirty years – like the more numerous builders of the less useful pyramids in the north. Not until the end of the seventeenth century was the stupendous task completed.

Along the outer walls, thirty feet in thickness, you can discern an irregular line showing the height when work stopped for a period while France and the Netherlands were at peace. Most of the time it was a life of relentless effort, with no mercy for the weaker brethren. Some of the soldiers tired of

carrying stone from the mountain, and mutinied. Four ringleaders were compelled to draw lots for life or death. The two who drew the lots of life were scourged and imprisoned; the other two went to the gallows.

Across the huge interior courtyard runs the Castle's richest scene – the Kat, or curtain, which started as a dividing wall fifteen feet deep at the base, and became the Governor's residence. This wall forms one of the Castle's mysteries, for it is unusual to find such thickness in a dwelling-house. It may have been intended as a second line of defence in case the enemy stormed the main gateway.

Against the Kat, then, grew up the magnificent architecture which is seen almost unchanged today. The entrance portico, with its curved steps of blue stone, wrought-iron balustrade and balcony would be a gem anywhere. All through the Dutch era, and for decades after the British occupation, this was the centre of life and authority in the colony. Here at least was a gracious atmosphere in which men and women accustomed to the amenities of Europe could learn to love the Cape.

Here was the Council Chamber where the Court of justice sat for nearly a century. Here church services were held before the Groote Kerk was built. This was the great hall which Lady Anne Barnard transformed into a

ballroom. “In a week or two I shall invite all who wish to be merry without cards or dice, but who can talk or hop to half a dozen black fiddlers, to come and see me on my public day,” she wrote. “The Dutch ladies (all of whom love dancing, and flirting still more) shall be kindly welcomed, and the poor ensigns and cornets shall have an opportunity of stretching their legs, as well as the generals.”

The interior walls of the Castle are lined with single and double-storeyed buildings. Some are noteworthy only for the barrack-room austerity familiar in all centuries. Others are filled with charming and romantic relics. Everywhere are the small paned windows with teak frames; and even the “ablutions”, the bathrooms of the soldiers, have a groined roof like a cathedral crypt. This room was once the arsenal.

You can find dripping dungeons and torture chambers easily enough, but the ordinary cells are up in the Catzenellenbogen bastion. Built in 1786, they have their original doors with double barred slits. Two cells were designed so that prisoners condemned to solitary confinement could not even see their jailers. They received their food on a plank.

Among many inscriptions is an effort by a deserter whose sense of humour has saved him from oblivion. Over the stinkwood door of his cell he carved these words: “Mrs. Reeve's Hotel. Lodging for Single gentlemen only.”

Cetewayo, the rebellious Zulu chief, was imprisoned here with his wives. More influential than some prisoners, he complained of the cold and had a fireplace built for his benefit.

Mr. W. H. Louwrens, an ex-military policeman who was appointed first official guide to the Castle a few years ago, was showing a party of thirty people round the cells when a small boy slipped outside unobserved and slammed the door. Only after blowing his whistle for a quarter of an hour did Mr. Louwrens secure the release of his party.

On these ramparts the ill-used prisoners of long ago carried heavy shot as a punishment. You can see the marks where they dropped the cannon balls on the cement. Leerdam bastion was the execution ground. Gardens and vines were planted on the ramparts. More than a hundred cannon, mortars and howitzers stood at the embrasures.

Among the oldest pieces of stone in the Castle is a carving in relief of the Dutch East India Company's arms, a ship in full sail, and the words *Goede Hoop*. This was probably removed from Van Riebeeck's mud fort and built

into the new ramparts. In the belfry of small, yellow Dutch clinkers over the main gateway hangs the Castle bell. Made in Amsterdam of bronze, it bears the date 1697. The beams have been renewed, but the bell still rings as it did when it tolled the hours and sounded alarms in the seventeenth century.

Antiquarians have not yet explored the Castle thoroughly, and if some of the bricks of last century were removed, interesting discoveries would be made. Mr. C. H. Smith, an architect, was present in 1890 when a small, unlighted cell was discovered in a wall. As recently as 1934 two old doors were found under the plaster in the Fortress Commander's office. They were opened, probably for the first time for centuries. Stone steps were revealed, under a low arched ceiling, leading up and down inside the huge walls to underground corridors and rooms once used for storing the garrison's corn.

During alterations in 1896, a small, unsuspected room was found in a rampart near Nassau bastion. It was equipped with a chair and table, and may have been a condemned cell. Architects who have studied the intricacies of the Kat believe that old rooms there have been bricked up for centuries.

In Lady Anne Barnard's drawing-room behind the ballroom, above a fireplace of Batavian bricks, is the famous haunted painting. It is a faint oil

colour of no artistic merit showing peacocks in a garden; and according to the Castle legend, anyone who tampers with it will fall dead on the spot.

Temptation to risk this fate is provided by a story of rich treasure of the Dutch East India Company hidden behind the painting. Another version has it that the painting marks the entrance to a secret passage leading to Government House. There is a fairly authentic legend of another secret passage between the Castle and Rust-en-Vreugde, half a mile away. Possibly this is based on the existence of an old watercourse running in the same direction which supplied the Castle with mountain water.

The first water supply was secured from a forty-foot well under an archway in the centre of the Castle. The teak door and wheel for the bucket rope are still in position. A careful excavation of this well might repay searchers after relics.

Many treasures of the Castle were lost during last century, before the historic building gained the affection it commands today. Some of the teak columns of the colonnade in the Council Chamber were replaced by cast-iron substitutes. Quaint lead gargoyles carrying rainwater from the balconies, brass knobs, antique locks and keys, wrought-metal lanterns, fine chandeliers, even doors were looted or flung on the rubbish heap.

Two of the Castle gateways, Grenade and Lion (with heraldic lions carved by Anreith) have gone. Lady Anne Barnard's garden in the inner courtyard has vanished. It is possible that excavation on the site might lead to the recovery of the carved dolphins which fed the pool in Lady Anne's garden.

Cape Town's first church stood within the Castle walls – a wooden building demolished as far back as 1679.

The Castle has suffered from unsightly additions. Brickwork on the ramparts, which fails to blend with the old Table Mountain stone, was laid by British soldiers in the eighteen-thirties. The military passion for cleanliness was responsible for much whitewash in the wrong places, and layers of paint were applied to beautiful teak. Huge rooms were ruined by partitions. Roofing tiles were tarred.

In our own time, however, much has been done to restore the old grandeur. Furniture, china, carpets, Delft vases, grandfather clocks and Lord Charles Somerset's swing-mirror create the right atmosphere. A recent addition which has a peculiar interest is the gallery of silhouettes of gunner officers who have been stationed at the Castle. This was started sixty years ago.

Just as there are people in London who have never walked within the Tower, so in Cape Town there are some to whom the Castle interior is an

unknown world. It is a memorable world in which the Vereinde Oost-Indische Compagnie becomes something more real than a monogram. You can see the crafty directors sitting in Amsterdam, controlling scores of ships and thousands of soldiers – and declaring forty per cent dividends in peak years.

How proud they were of that V O C monogram. They had it carved on each side of the Castle gate below the Dutch lion; it was engraved on the key-plates of kists; stamped on the Company's coins. China, bokaals glasses, swords and silver, buttons, cannons, lamps, plates and metal platters – all bore the V O C monogram. It follows you round the Castle and remains engraved in the memory.

“Jan Kompanie” and the closely affiliated Dutch West India Company built an empire stretching from New York to the spice islands of the East Indies. Explorers, paid in V O C coin, reached the Great Southland that is now Australia, and they named New Zealand. For long years the Castle was their half-way house. The six coats of arms above Simon van der Stel's gateway are reminders of a great trading era – Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Delft, Hoorn, Enkhuizen and Middelburg, surmounted by the arms of the Netherlands, flanked by the V O C emblem.

They were building this Castle at the time of the Great Fire of London. In these courtyards the “burgher dragoons”, the farmers and part-time soldiers of early days were cursed by regular corporals for their slovenly drill – though they handled their flintlocks skilfully enough and kept their powder dry. In this building such craftsmen as Anreith, Thibault, Schutte and Jacobus Graf the carpenter had their workshops. This is where you step back into the age of sundials and see the phantoms of Dutch cavaliers. Here indeed is the Cape Town that once stood “at earth's extremist end”.

AMONG THE railway lines at Woodstock stood a board with the words: “Fort Knokke. The remains of. Built 1734.” It was a weak fort of earth and masonry, laid out on the “star” plan; but it had fine sentry boxes. One of them, weighing fourteen tons, was jacked up and carted with great difficulty to the South African Museum not long ago.

Fort Knokke provided a surprise in 1928, when the ground just outside the earthworks subsided. An arsenal was revealed, with weapons of all ages. There were a number of small cannon of the Dutch Company's period, and some of the best specimens were used to fill gaps along the Castle walls. Further excavation brought hundreds of rusty rifles to the surface – old

Martini Henrys, double-barrelled muzzle-loaders, rifles with sliding bolts and dropping bolts. Old saddlery, bits and traces, battered mess tins, water-bottles, spades, first-aid cases and leather-cases for field-glasses all saw the light again.

This mystery was cleared up by a retired colonel who remembered the sale of surplus military material after the South African War. He had bought a pair of Zeiss field-glasses for half-a-crown at that time, and a saddle for two shillings. What the army could not sell, they buried.

Thousands of four-pronged iron instruments came up with the guns. This device stood about five inches high, and no matter how it was thrown on the ground one spiked end remained upwards. It would have been a cruel weapon against horses. I was reminded of it during World War II, when I saw a vastly improved model dropped from German aircraft on Western Desert aerodromes. They ripped up rubber tyres like paper.

Fort Knokke was demolished to make way for the relief main railway lines to the north. The stone and most of the earthworks were carted off to form the approaches to the pedestrian bridge over the new lines. When it was built, Fort Knokke was linked with the Imhoff battery and the Castle by a number of redoubts along the shore, known as the Sea Lines. About half a century later

French troops from India, the Pondicherry Regiment, threw up a fortified line from Fort Knokke to a point on the Devil's Peak slopes. They placed redoubts along these "French Lines", one at the Tollgate, another in the present Trafalgar Park. Traces of the latter redoubt have been preserved.

Sir James Craig strengthened this line during the First British Occupation by putting up blockhouses on Devil's Peak commanding the approach from False Bay. From the highest of all, King's Blockhouse, you can see False Bay and the Castle. This one was used as a signalling station, but its guns were never fired against an enemy. The whole line made a convenient boundary between Cape Town proper and the district; and it was proclaimed in 1814 as the southern limit of the Burgher Senate's jurisdiction.

King's Blockhouse was dismantled more than a century ago. Much later it housed the convicts planting trees on Devil's Peak; and now it is an historic monument. Not far away is the forest station, where the ranger and his family live serenely above the city with their garden, cows and hens. They inherit the great panorama once scanned anxiously by Cape Town's defender.

CHAPTER 3
IN CAPE TOWN LONG AGO

*Broad streets of pleasant shade,
And houses plain and white,
Where broken sunbeams made
A green and gold brocade
Of shadow and of light,
'Twas how it looked I know
In Cape Town long ago.*

“Rip van Winkle”

ASK lovers of Old Cape Town to name their favourite buildings, and the first choice of many would be the Martin Melck House in Strand Street. This at once invites a comparison with the magnificent ⁴ Koopmans de Wet House in the same street; but that severe, classical building with fluted pilasters is not so typical of the old Cape architecture as the Martin Melck, mellow in the afternoon sun.

⁴ The Koopmans de Wet House is fully described in Lawrence Green's *In the Land of Afternoon*.

Some old houses have an undeniable grandeur which is often depressing. In the Martin Melck, age is accompanied by a happy atmosphere.

Cape Town has only one trilogy of eighteenth-century buildings – the Dutch Lutheran Church with the koster's (sexton's) house on one side and the Martin Melck, formerly the parsonage, on the other. These three linked buildings form a grand historic monument. These three inspired Lady Anne Barnard and Thomas Bowler; and artists still fall under their spell.

Their story goes back two centuries, to the time when Lutherans were forbidden to hold services outside their own homes. At intervals the Lutheran chaplain of a Danish or Swedish ship would conduct a secret religious service in a loft. But members of the community longed for a church of their own, and the first Martin Melck, a wealthy farmer and most determined man, decided to provide one.

Melck had this large plot of ground facing Strand Street, next to two large corn and wine stores. So when Governor Ryk Tulbagh asked Melck what the new building on the plot was to be, Melck said it might be used as a wine store. Tulbagh was suspicious. There are two versions of this conversation.



Strand Street in 1832, with the Lutheran Church, parsonage and koster's house – a beautiful trilogy of eighteenth century buildings.

According to one, Tulbagh declared: “As long as I live there will be no Lutheran Church at the Cape.”

The second version supplies this dramatic dialogue.

Tulbagh: “Mr. Melck, when I pass by that church which is building I shall shut the eye nearest to it.”

Melck: “Sir, God Himself will close the eyes of the man who may not look at the building of His house.”

Tulbagh died before the church was finished. The first service was held in 1780, and although the authorities did not interfere with the opening, it was some years before the Lutherans were allowed to have an organ.

Anton Anrieth, finest craftsman of his day, carved the massive pulpit with the two supporting figures of Hercules, the cherub, the white swan above and the golden swan below. In several official guides Anreith is credited with the design of the buildings as well; but this is unlikely, for he was a sculptor, not an architect. From the purely artistic point of view, the Lutheran pulpit is regarded as a finer piece of work than Anreith's other masterpiece – the pulpit in the Dutch Reformed Church, Adderley Street.

For a time it was known as “the barn church” or “the church with a swan”. Not until 1820 were the clock tower and steeple added. Even then, with full religious tolerance in force, the Dutch Reformed Church authorities protested against the building of the spire; a handsome embellishment which, they were convinced, should be displayed only by the established church.

To this day this Dutch Lutheran Church is the only one in Southern Africa, and some members of the congregation have to make long journeys for baptisms and marriages. Many of the German members of the church broke away a century ago, when the pastor refused to have an altar, and built their own German Lutheran Church at the top of Long Street.

Anreith's sure touch and delicate artistry is seen at its best in the swan on the Martin Melck pediment. Compare it with the swan outside the church and you see a mere plasterer's effort in contrast with the work of a master. Other decorations on the parsonage facade, scrolls and an open book over a central window, are also Anreith's work.

Old drawings reveal decorative urns on the parapets of all three buildings. Most of them fell to the ground during the 1809 earthquake; and a wine

cellar further up the street acquired two urns and set them up on the gateway.

Parsonage and koster's house became boarding-houses in 1894. On the fanlight of the parsonage the words "Bloemfontein House" were painted; and a tea advertisement was blazoned across one of the white walls. Spacious rooms were partitioned. The koster's house, with eleven rooms, became two houses with two commonplace front doors instead of the fine single entrance shown in Lady Anne Barnard's drawing. Sacrilege of that kind was common enough in those days.

During the South African War the fanlight and some of the windows were damaged by stone-throwing as a result of a suspicion that the boarding-house was sheltering Boer sympathizers. But the most dangerous moment for the old house came in 1929, when the church needed funds and there was a risk that the battered and dilapidated old building might be altered out of all recognition to suit a new tenant. A company was formed to save the house, and rooms were let to literary, dramatic and other clubs.

Then it received the name of Martin Melck House and the church trustees restored it nobly. The whole facade was stripped; plastering was carried out according to the original plans; cornices were rebuilt; a handsome fanlight,

suggesting an open Bible, was fitted into the old iron framework. On the stoep the Batavian brickwork was repaired.

Yet I am still puzzled when I see the four beautiful ground-floor windows without shutters. I have a photograph of the building taken early this century, and there were shutters at that time. It was the custom to fit shutters downstairs, but never upstairs.

Three lofty rooms on the ground floor each measure twenty-eight by eighteen feet, and one of these, with two small-paned windows overlooking the courtyard, is probably the most impressive in the house. Teak boards a foot in width were used in many of the rooms. Entrance and inner halls are paved with square red Batavian tiles. Inside doors are of teak with yellow-wood panels.

The old kitchen, with its fine teak beam over the wide fireplace, has been skilfully converted into a bedroom; and the large pantry is now the kitchen. There is a trap-door in the ceiling of the former kitchen. One of the last-century pastors would not allow anyone to disturb him while he was writing his sermon. When he required food he simply lowered a basket into the kitchen – and went on developing his unbroken theme.

From the back stoep you walk down steps of small yellow Batavian bricks to the courtyard paved with blue Table Mountain stone. Beyond that is the garden, once a long botanical garden stretching far back towards the edge of Table Bay.

Mrs. E. Bowater, who has rented the Martin Melck and the koster's house from the church authorities since 1936, found the garden neglected. She has restored the old-world atmosphere here, just as she has furnished the rooms with antiques and beautified the interior in many ways. Lutheran seafarers brought foreign trees and exotic growths to this garden long ago, and some are still there. The palm trees must be almost as old as the house. Rubber trees from the East Indies still flourish, and there are two South American trees which have puzzled botanists. Mrs. Bowater has planted a moonflower, bougainvillaea and oleanders. Though much smaller than the original garden, this is a gracious, shaded sanctuary indeed to find in the middle of a city. Here you are surrounded by the restful architecture of church and parsonage.

A large cellar with heavy beams has its entrance in the courtyard. Here, too, is the interesting alley with arches between parsonage and church.

The koster's house once resembled the parsonage closely. Sometime during the Victorian era, however, an iron balcony was added, obscuring the lovely facade. If this house is restored, it will balance the Martin Melck admirably. The removal of the ironwork will be like taking a grotesque mask from a pleasing face.

When the Lutherans built the koster's house they decided not to crown it with a dak kamer. The Martin Melck, of course, has a fine specimen of this fascinating roof room. You go upstairs, first to the long gallery (now used as a dining-room) with five doors leading into bedrooms. Yellow-wood was used for the flooring upstairs. In some of the windows you can detect the purple tint of the original glass. A steep, narrow staircase leads from the gallery to the dak kamer.

What was the purpose of the dak kamer, the solitary room on the flat roof? Early writers on Cape architecture put forward the theory that the dak kamer was built so that the owner could watch the shipping. You can still see the harbour from the Martin Melck roof, and imagine the wider scene that bygone occupants of that room gazed upon. It has four windows, though the fourth is really a door leading on to the roof.



Cape Town's first Roman Catholic Church is seen against Lion's Head in this sketch.

Dr. Mary Cook, an authority on old Cape Houses, has traced these little rooms back to Amsterdam. There the merchants built similar rooms to store the gear used for hoisting goods from the street.

Dak kamer gables are different from all the other many types. You never find one in the country, though the town was full of them early last century. This dak kamer gable of the Martin Melck House, with its scroll and wing, is the very last in Cape Town.

*And little running streams
With little bridges spanned,
Whose waters caught the beams
Of sudden glooms and gleams,
And music made, I know,
In Cape Town long ago.*

WHEREVER YOU go in the Cape Peninsula today, old buildings, old houses, old gardens are vanishing. This is the victory of the bulldozer. Day after day, in city and suburbs you may watch the flattening of the landmarks. Some of the houses deserve to disappear, for they are Victorian relics in

slums. Others are fine old family homes in Sea Point and elsewhere; one sees their swift destruction with regret.

Many of them were built by excellent Malay craftsmen in the second half of last century. Though they reflect the beginnings of the mechanical age, they used corrugated iron and cast-iron with great taste and restraint. You observe it in the graceful curves of the stoep roofs, the delicacy of cast-iron columns, the “carpenters' lace” in the shape of fret-carved roof gables.

When it comes to relics of Dutch East India days, you can be sure of righteous public indignation the moment demolition is mentioned. So many have gone that Cape Town cannot afford to lose the survivors.

“Perhaps no town in the world so small as Cape Town contains an equal number of elegant and spacious houses,” wrote Captain Harris in 1835. “Cape Town is perhaps the handsomest town in the world of its size; and almost every building, either respectable or ornamental which it contains was erected by the Dutch inhabitants previous to its being captured by the British.”

It is remarkable that such a tradition should have been established by the early Cape builders, for they were handicapped in many ways. Certainly the

directors of the company in Holland did not favour dignified architecture in this far outpost. All they wanted was economy.

So the builders had to look round for local materials. If they had not been in love with their work they would have despaired, for the stone they found close at hand was hard to quarry and the limestone, from Robben Island was too soft. Cape bricks weathered badly. They had to send expeditions up the coast in search of mussel shells so that they could plaster their houses with the lime.

Charles Lockyer, an English visitor of 1706, was not impressed. “The church and hospital are all of the public buildings that make anything of a figure,” he recorded. “The town is open on all sides and contains about 100 houses. They have no shops as in their settlements in India. However, the inhabitants will buy any commodities that are proper for the place, being sure of a quick sale among their friends in the country when the ships are gone.”

Though several fine country houses were built late in the seventeenth century, Cape Town only began to look dignified during the eighteenth century. By that time the timber was coming in after long treks on ox-wagons. The typical Cape workmanship was taking shape – neither Dutch nor oriental, but a blend with a great deal of originality about it.

Town houses in Holland, for example, were crowded and the fronts were high and narrow. There was no reason to copy them in the spacious Cape settlement, so the Cape Town houses were always wider than their height. Stoep design revealed a Batavian influence, but in the Cape the wide stoeps relied on oaks or vines for shade, whereas the tropical stoeps were covered by the builders. The height of the stoeps above street level was a Dutch idea. Though the architects had left the land of canals, they still aimed at placing the stoeps well above possible floods. It is said that the brick seats finished in tiles, found at each end of the full width stoeps were for the slave servants who waited there while their owners paid calls inside. Down the steps ran wrought-iron railings with brass terminals.

While bricks and tiles were made at the Cape, the small red Amsterdam bricks were the neatest, and the glazed Dutch tiles the most artistic. Large shipments of bricks arrived until late in the eighteenth century. You find them mainly in stoeps and face works, with the yellow “klompjes” that have weathered so well. Grey bricks (“grauwe moppen”) were also imported for roofs.

Paving tiles were either of Robben Island slate, or were brought from Holland or Batavia. The type of Dutch tile which made up a wall picture is rare today.

Whether they were building a castle or a wine cellar, those pioneers were true to their materials. Plaster and white-wash were never disguised. Facades were plain,

as a rule, for decorations would have thrown harsh shadows in the strong sunshine. Ornamentation was reserved for gables, entrance doors with stately fanlights, and metal work. Cape Town possessed some of the finest doors in the world; undoubtedly there was a Belgian influence, but the bold rich Cape doors were more artistic than the originals. Hinges, locks, bolts, brass door handles were designed by master craftsmen and gave an unsurpassed finish. Adriaan van der Stel was accused of detaining skilled locksmiths at the Cape for this purpose when they should have gone on to the Dutch East Indies.

Gables were the link in design between the Netherlands and Cape Town. Builders in the Low Countries had to provide lofts for houses that had their feet in water; thus the lofts and gables came south and added to the beauty of the Cape. But in their new home the gables were of plaster instead of brick and stone. The scroll gable may have been evolved at the Cape, for it is not to be found in the Netherlands.

Then there were the large teak windows and massive shutters dictated by the Cape climate and gaining in effect by repetition. Upper and lower window sashes were nearly always equal in height, following the seventeenth-century custom in Holland.

Fireplaces, apart from kitchen hearths, were rarely built in town or country houses owing to the risk of fire. The early Capetonians warmed themselves with the aid of charcoal in copper pans.

These hospitable people built large reception rooms. The whole ground floor plan belonged essentially to the Cape; it was designed for local conditions. In a town where timber was a problem, staircases had to be simple.

It was only at the end of the seventeenth century that double-storeyed houses began to appear in Cape Town. Valentyn counted 254 private houses in 1714 and remarked: "They are mostly built of Cape stone and are, therefore, of one storey because they would otherwise suffer too much from the heavy gusts of wind. Such houses likewise are generally, for that reason, covered with thatch. A double-storey house has two salons (zaletten) on the street and several middle and back rooms, and often also a large yard behind."

Not until 1732 was the first flat-roofed house built in Cape Town. It was a three-storeyed building put up by a rich and enterprising tailor named Muller. On the roof were Dutch clinker tiles set in lime plaster and coated with oil to keep out the rain. Muller's roof aroused great interest in a

thatched town that lived in dread of fire. Slaves caused a serious fire a few years later while a south-easter was raging, and many alarmed householders followed Muller's example. The usual method of constructing a flat roof was to place ceiling-boards on strong beams. Shell lime mixed with broken shells was laid on the upper side of the boards and rammed into a compact mass. As a waterproof roof it was not always as snug as thatch, though some shell-lime roofs are probably still defying the winter rains to this day.

Forty years later Sparrman reported: "The houses are pretty; they are usually of two storeys and the majority are in stucco, whitened externally. Some are painted in green. This colour, which one never sees in our homes in Sweden, is the favourite colour with the Dutch. With them, houses, clothes, rowing-boats, ships, all are green."

De Yonge in 1783 also praised the "fine and handsome houses" and declared: "Building is here not simply a hobby, it is a passion, a madness, an infectious craze which almost everyone has caught."

Thatch vanished almost completely in town during the first few decades of the nineteenth century. An Englishwoman visitor in 1836 declared that Cape Town was just like the Dutch toy towns with its straight streets, white houses of only two storeys with flat roofs and trees in almost every street. "The place is filled with

English, Dutch, Hottentots, Malays, Parsees, fleas and bugs,” she added. “The last appear to be the principal inhabitants and the oldest settlers.”

By the middle of last century there were more than three thousand houses, more than three hundred stores and a population of 25,000 people of all races. There had been a building boom that lasted a quarter of a century and doubled the size of the town; but the population had not increased much owing to outbreaks of smallpox and measles.

Tall buildings came to Cape Town very late last century. The first cut stone building, three-storeyed, was the Colonial Mutual in 1888; while Adderley Street had several buildings of six storeys before the century ended. Cape Town's tallest building today (tallest in Africa, in fact) is the 276-foot Old Mutual building in Darling Street.

Such buildings meet the needs of a modern city and provide strong contrasts. From a high place you can see all sorts of architecture – fine and grotesque, a Dutch gable with a typical London chimney-pot on the same building. You can see a strange mingling of spires, Gothic, Finnish, Russian. Huge office blocks loom over the Old Town House. But nothing can match the charm of those remaining white walls. Mellowed by centuries of sunlight, their repose is full of dignity, the repose of the quiet, unhurried Cape Town that they alone knew.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE has been altered and enlarged so often that it is hard to trace the original guest house built by Simon van der Stel for the entertainment of distinguished foreign visitors. Nevertheless, the walls of 1682 still stand in the centre of the building, and rank among the oldest domestic walls in the town.

The idea that led the Dutch East India Company to provide a guest house was not entirely hospitable. It was felt that if foreigners were allowed to set foot within the Castle they might learn the weaknesses of that badly-situated fortress. Simon van der Stel, in fact, was nearly recalled when news reached Holland that he had received certain French officers in the Castle.

So a discreet site was selected in the Company's gardens; Father Tachard the Jesuit described it three years after this pleasant residence had been opened. He called it "a little banquet house where nobody lives", and he was enthusiastic about it. "The lower storey consists of a porch open to the garden and the Fort, with two little halls on either side," wrote Tachard. "Over that, there is a pavilion open every way, betwixt two terraces paved with brick – the one looking towards the north and the other to the south. The pavilion seemed to be purposely made for our design. The garden is open all day and admission is free to all without distinction

of person. Yet it is strictly forbidden to pluck anything, however trifling, or to do any damage.”

Tachard, of course, was an astronomer as well as a missionary; and the “design” he mentions was the determination of the longitude of Cape Town and the magnetic variation. A well-known woodcut of the period depicts Tachard's observatory, but it was drawn by someone who had never seen the place. The observatory is shown at the edge of Table Bay, on the wrong side of the Castle. Tachard did not confine himself to astronomy. As the Dutch feared, he carried back much useful military information to France, thus defeating the purpose of the guest house.

Some years ago an architect discovered an old plan of Government House with the guest house tinted red in the centre. He was thus able to find the original walls, covered with later plaster facings.

The second storey was added late in the eighteenth century, probably under Thibault's direction. At this period, too, the ante-room, morning-room and other improvements were made.

Bernadin St. Pierre, the novelist, recorded that in Governor Tulbagh's time there were some fine portraits in oils in the guesthouse – Tromp, de Ruyter and others. These, unfortunately, have vanished.

Among the early British entertainments there was a ball given by General Sir James Craig, when the gardens were illuminated by hundreds of oil lamps. Lord Macartney was the first British Governor to occupy Government House, and he complained of the steep staircase. Lady Anne Barnard wrote: "Nothing short of Lord Macartney's resolution to do nothing, and the beautiful thing called habit, which accustomed him to hop up like a parrot on its perch, would have made it practicable for a person with a gouty tendency to mount it."

Sir George Yonge held a levee at Government House in 1801 at which "several French officers of distinction (prisoners of war) and other respectable personages were present". Those were indeed the days of gentlemen's wars.

Lord Charles Somerset, a lavish and energetic character where his own comfort was concerned, found Government House in decay. Indeed, the winter gales of 1822 had made parts of the building dangerous. "Only a short time since I had a most providential escape, a portion of the roof having fallen in on my own sitting-room soon after I had quitted it, upon the very chair that I had occupied for several hours," declared Somerset. "The two wings are now supported by props in the rooms."

Repairs were made, but in March, 1829, the *Government Gazette* published a notice that caused deep disappointment in Cape Town society: "The aide-de-camp

in waiting is commanded to notify that in consequence of the insecure state of the ballroom at Government House, His Excellency the Governor and Lady Frances Cole have to regret that the ball usually held on April 23 in honour of His Majesty's birthday must be unavoidably postponed.”

Money was tight at that period. Macartney had drawn a salary of £10,000 a year as Governor, with an allowance of £2,000. Soon after Lord Charles Somerset's departure, however, the Governor's salary was cut to £7,500, and Government House had to wait for restoration.

Further alterations were made in the middle of last century. The parapet was built, the slave quarters doubled in height and converted into servants' rooms. The slate roof was laid in 1874. A change for the worse was the ugly front porch, which meant the loss of the V O C monogram and decorative scrollwork. Government House was at its best early last century. The facade was then in the finest tradition of an elaborate Dutch town house, as a drawing by Schutte reveals.

Government House was the scene of the opening of the first Cape Parliament by Governor Darling in 1854. For thirty years the ceremony took place there, until the present Parliament buildings were provided.

As far back as 1889, Government House was denounced as “wholly unsuitable for the purpose”. This is a cry which has often been heard since then, though many of

the rooms are charming. Towards the end of last century, however, Government House had some odd neighbours. At the sharp angle of the road between the old Goede Hoop Lodge and the governor's servants' quarters stood a little cottage. It was placed in such a way that strangers thought they were walking straight into the doorway. And there was a busy old woman running a laundry. Round another sharp corner were the piggeries. Children formed the impression that the governor of those days lived on a diet of pork and beans. Both the cottage and the pigs have been removed, but the name of The Piggeries survives.

A fiasco at Government House which many remember was the State Ball at the time of the opening of the first Union Parliament. Three thousand guests had been invited to be presented to the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. They arrived in Stal Plein at nine p.m., causing a traffic jam on a scale Cape Town had never known before. Some of them were so eager to meet the Duke and Duchess that the guard had to be called out, with fixed bayonets, to deal with the rush of people in evening dress.

The grounds of Government House have shrunk with the years to six acres, and envious political eyes have been cast on this domain. An encroachment of forty years ago was the debating chamber of the House of Assembly. Mr. Paul Sauer once suggested in the Assembly that the Governor-General did not need two

houses in Cape Town, and that if he made Westbrooke his only home, there would be room for Parliament to expand. This may still come to pass, so that the little guest house of Simon van der Stel will see another transformation.

CHAPTER 4

LAW AND ORDER

“LOT EIGHT,” announced the auctioneer. “Eight long grey poles, a trap-door framework, twenty steps and other timber – and a box to hold the outfit.”

I watched lot eight knocked down to a fish merchant for five guineas. Soon afterwards I saw a group of people, with queer expressions on their faces, gathered round lot eight. Only then did I (and the fish merchant) discover that lot eight was the portable gallows used for more than fifty years by Cape Town's official hangmen. This portable gallows had travelled round the old Cape Colony again and again in the wake of the Circuit Court. This grim, inevitable symbol of justice had followed by ox-wagon the gay Cape cart procession of judge and advocate through the countryside before the railways were laid.

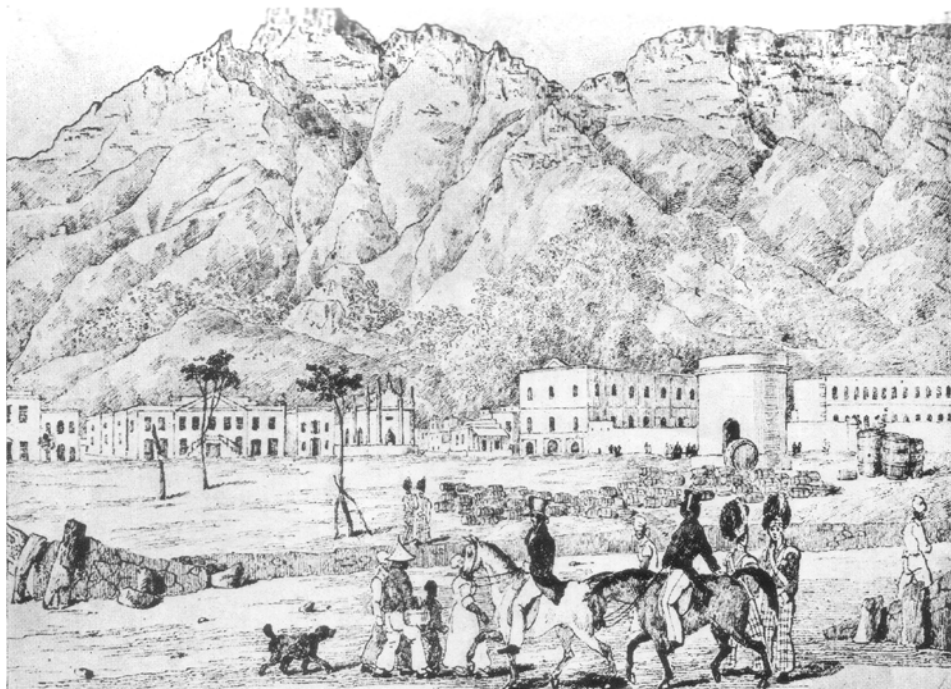
There was an elderly man at the sale who recalled that the eight grey poles were erected outside the gaol in Roeland Street for one of the last public executions. “It took place at dawn, and two Hottentots were hanged side by side,” he told me. “The mob stretched from the top of Plein Street to the top of Roeland Street. The hangman put white caps over the heads of the condemned men, and it was over quickly. But I remember the shudder that ran down the street.”

Gallows, steps, trap-door and all, went into the furnace. They would have been worth more than five guineas to a showman, but at the time there were no offers for the sinister timber.

That sale took place in a fine old building in Buitenkant Street, the old magistrates' court with the facade enriched by Anton Anreith's figures of Neptune and Britannia and the royal coat-of-arms. I worked there for a year, as a young court reporter. The place gripped me, not only because of the daily cavalcade of human nature at its worst, but because of its past.

It was in 1809 that the Burgher Senate decided to sell some waste land on the outskirts of the town; and Jacob Hendricks, formerly a baker in the Company's service, bought it. Hendricks put the place up as a granary and bakery. He sold out to the government in 1813, but it remained the town granary for a number of years. Then the colonial engineer (forerunner of the Public Works Department) and other officials were given quarters there. The lower portion became Cape Town's prison for females. In the early eighteen-forties the magistrates' court and police station were housed in the building.

Caledon Square in those days was bounded by wine cellars, inns and private houses. It was like a village common overgrown with weeds. Abandoned wagons, broken carts and shattered wine casks were dumped in the centre.



Caledon Square and the barracks in 1832. Young colts were broken in on the square, and dragoons exercised there.

Young colts were broken in on the square, and dragoons exercised there. Not until 1924 did the magistrates and the police move out of the old building. They moved with a strong feeling of relief; for the statuary and artistic portico had been no comfort to those who had sweltered during so many summers in the overcrowded rooms and cells. Today the old granary has become the Caledon Square post office; and the Public Works Department offices are there as of old. Cells have been converted into storerooms and workshops. All relics of crime have disappeared.

Cape Town has had many picturesque police stations. Kalk Bay police station, closed down not long ago, was built as a fisherman's cottage ninety years ago, and it was a cafe just before the police moved in. A coloured man was given the contract to build the cells. He received his pay, and celebrated so riotously that he was the first man to be locked up there.

Mowbray police station, demolished not long ago, was an eighteenth-century farm house. Chain-and-ball relics of the slave days were kept on the stoep. Walls were two feet thick, and the ceilings were supported by huge yellow-wood beams.

Wale Street had a police station for many years that was once the Brand family home, a fine old mansion with all the famous architectural features

of Dutch East India Company's days. It had a dak kamer, and another of Anreith's pediments embodying a crowned eagle, a drum, grape shot, a cannon ball and a flag. Historians have tried without success to discover the meaning of it all. It was built some time before the end of the eighteenth century, but the records have been lost. Once it had windows very like the Martin Melck House; and the slave quarters at the back (later used as cells) had a carved pediment. This mansion was the early home of Mr. G. B. van Zyl, former Governor-General. In 1938 it was demolished to make way for the enormous Provincial headquarters.

Then there is the low stone building, not far from the oil tanks in Table Bay Docks, which has served as a police station since 1861. The newly-formed Water Police were the first to occupy it, and *The Cape Argus* commented: "This is an excellent improvement. Their duties are to take intoxicated sailors to their ships, arrest deserters and guard the wharves."

Executions were still being held in public on Gallows Hill, close to the docks police station, in those days; and it fell to the Water Police to preserve order on such occasions. Gallows Hill has vanished. It was composed of sandstone and white sand, much in demand at the time when the floors of taverns were strewn with sand. So beachcombers and sailors haunted this neighbourhood, filled their

sacks, carried them to the taverns and received cheap sherry in payment. The old police station is still there, down below, but the grim landmark of Gallows Hill disappeared long ago into the sacks of thirsty sailors.

Long after public executions had been abolished, the hangmen used to boast about their skill, and every detail of a hanging soon spread through the town. King, the Cape hangman at the end of last century, had been bos'un in a sailing ship. He deserted in 1880, became a jail warder, and succeeded a hangman named Von Witt.

Von Witt, according to King, was too fond of the bottle. "I saw him torture a man for thirty minutes before he was disposed of," remarked King with righteous indignation. "I felt for the man, because he was an old sea chum of mine. He was condemned for shooting his sweetheart, down on the beach."

Von Witt, in order to terrify men about to be hanged, used to dress in a lawyer's gown, held round him by a belt in which he stuck the knife which he used to cut the rope, and also a revolver. He disguised his features with a false beard and green glasses, and fortified himself with a bottle of dop. King scorned both disguise and alcohol.

King often told a story of a coincidence in hanging circles. On March 14' 1887, he was in Kimberley, where he hanged a man named King. On the same day Berry,

the hangman of England, was hanging a Mrs. Berry for a number of murders in Lancashire. "You don't often hear of two executioners having to hang their namesakes in that way," King used to remark with pride.

King told a reporter in 1897 that he had hanged more than a hundred people in fourteen years. The reporter mentioned that there had been complaints (still made today) about the "refined cruelty" of keeping condemned men for long periods waiting for the rope.

"Why it's the best thing that could happen to them," retorted , King. "For the first two or three weeks after the trial they have not got rid of the animal in them. But in the end they become nice and quiet and fit for me to handle them. I never have an assistant with me. As a rule I get it over very easily. I am allowed from six until ten in the morning; but I am usually never more than a quarter of an hour, including the pinioning, from beginning to end. Very often it is only a few minutes, if they're quiet. Fractious! Why, I can handle the worst of them, and I have handled some big men in my time. I had a bad time with one some four or five years ago, and I was laid up for three weeks. But that was an exceptional case. I have made the men wear shirt, trousers and stockings only since then. No boots, if you follow what I mean."

SCAFFOLDS AND “engines of torture” were all too prominent in Cape Town long ago. One of the oldest places of execution was near the Castle, somewhere in the present Buitenkant Street. There several bodies could often be seen dangling from the gibbets. There, too, prisoners were “broken on the wheel”, flogged or branded. Cape Town's seventeenth-century executioner had a double-edged sword, which is preserved in the South African Museum; but this was merely an emblem of office and I have still to find evidence of any offender having his head cut off.

The executioner's authorized fees were as follows: “For every person he might kill, no matter in what manner, six reals of eight” (four shillings).

“For a person who has committed suicide, but whom the judge may order to hang on the gallows, three reals of eight.”

“For any punishment when death does not follow, such as flogging, branding with red-hot iron, cutting off ears, boring a hole through the tongue, cutting off a hand or putting out eyes, three reals of eight.”

“For torturing, two reals of eight.”

The executioner also carried out lesser punishments, such as exposing a prisoner on the scaffold with a board round the neck describing his offence;

firing a shot or waving a sword over the head. Presumably this child's-play brought him no more than one real.

Slave girls who killed their infants were tied up in sacks and dropped into Table Bay. Burning alive was the seventeenth century punishment for arson.

Lord Macartney abolished all forms of torture and barbarous methods of execution in 1796, but the custom of putting the heads of executed criminals on poles and leaving the bodies to swing from the gallows lingered on for a few more years.

FOR NEARLY two centuries Cape Town's chief of police was an official with the title of Fiscal – a name which survives in the shape of the Janfiskaal, Jacky Hangman or butcher-bird. That shows you how popular the Fiscal was. When the Hottentots stole van Riebeeck's cattle, the Fiscal's men went after the raiders. In later years he often abused his powers; for he was entitled to pocket one-third of all the fines he imposed.

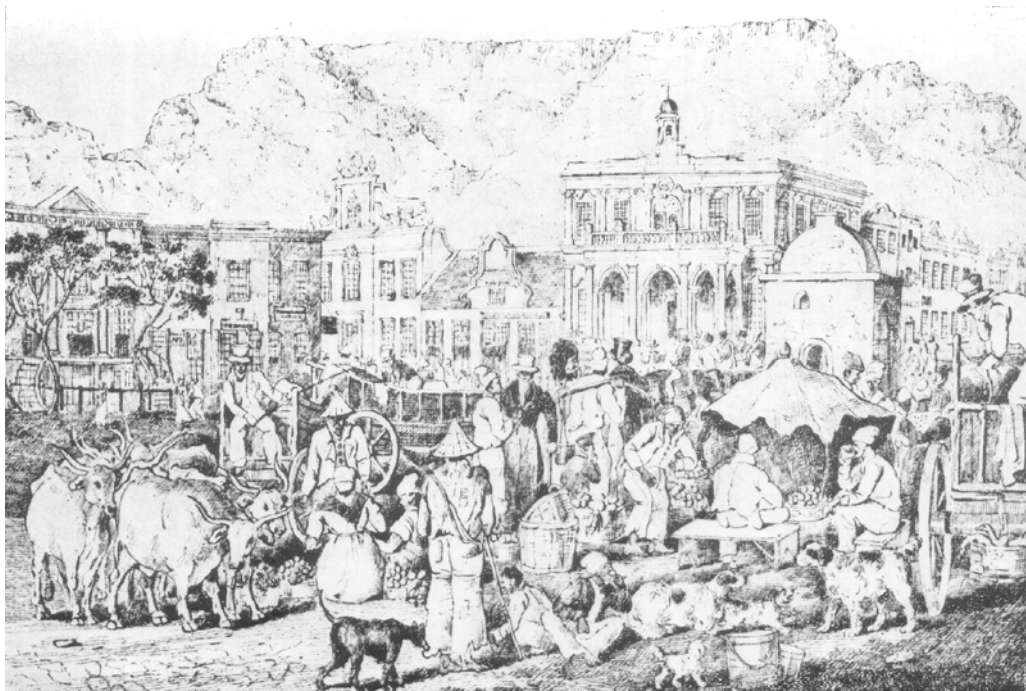
Cape Town's first guardians of the law were Company's men who were released from service three years after the founding of the settlement. They had to protect the houses at night against thieves and fire. These men were

given a dilapidated building as their headquarters. Many petitions were signed for a proper *wagthuis*; but exactly a century passed before the Watch House was built in Greenmarket Square.

No doubt the burghers of two centuries ago were sarcastic about it, but the square building with its huge sash windows was worth the delay. The handsome bell turret came much later. Apart from the Castle, the massive *wagthuis* was for a long period the grandest building in the town. Merchants rented the vaults as wine stores.

In the *wagthuis* the burgher guard kept their muskets and blunderbusses, gunpowder and leaden bullets. Every evening at nine the captain of the guard inspected them and they marched off to patrol the streets. Unlike the silent policemen of today, these watchmen relied largely on their rattles to overawe resistance. The rattle watch lasted a long time in Cape Town, and even when a regular police force had been organized the old watchmen remained on duty for some years.

It was all laid down in the *Gazette* of 1817, and here is an extract: "The watchmen being informed of any disturbance or evil design, they shall immediately spring their rattles and loudly call out murder, thieves or the like." They were still on duty in the 1840's, wearing capes and carrying



Greenmarket Square in April 1832.

lanterns with tallow candles, their rattles stuck in their waist belts. One character whose beat was Long Street used to shout remarks about the state of the weather and other information for which he was paid. “Baks the eating-house keeper has sosaties and rice ready for all who want supper,” he would cry. Then, late at night, he would drop off to sleep in his sentry-box in Overbeek Square.

The earliest police force in the modern sense of the word was organized in 1828 under Superintendent W. C. van Ryneveld. Constables received £23 a year and carried swords. Pistols were supplied only when a constable was escorting a prisoner. There were people who doubted whether policemen should be allowed to carry swords. During a brawl on the Parade a young man named Robertson was slashed across the thigh by a policeman with a sword; he bled to death, and after that the swords were withdrawn and replaced by staves.

Another result of the Parade incident was the importation of Inspector King of the London Police to take charge of the force in Cape Town. A century ago King had at his disposal four sub inspectors, four sergeants and forty constables. His salary was £200 a year, and he told a select committee of the House of Assembly that he had not applied for more because he thought it would be useless. By that time the pay of a constable had risen to £60 a year. Blue uniforms were issued in 1860, and

nine years later the Cape Town police received grey helmets bearing the letters “V R” in a laurel wreath. Rattles and lanterns had gone and truncheons had arrived.

CHAPTER 5

PLACES OF REFRESHMENT

*The following elegant Bill of Fare
Will give some idea of what will be there
Rich black puddings long and slender;
Lamb's secrets for the young lasses.
Strong Cape brandy in large glasses;
Sheep trotters and apple fritters
Lots of sopies, gin and bitters
Liver and light and fat sheep tails
The best Cape wine in ample pails.*

Frederick Brookes. "South African Grins." 1825.

WITH three centuries of wine lists and menus to ponder over, I have a strong feeling that Cape Town has never seen better value for florins than that provided by the Widow Neethling. Bernadin de Sainte-Pierre, the French novelist, and certainly a man with a palate, stayed with her in 1771 and declared: "There is more elegance in a Cape boarding-house than in a Dutch or French tavern."

Each generous day in the Widow Neethling's parlour started with a choice of tea or coffee, with bread and butter. Boarders could help themselves from a sideboard

loaded with melons, apricots, peaches, raisins, pears and cheese. At noon the fish and game were brought on. In the afternoon, of course, tea and coffee were served. Supper at eight was a splendid meal. Wine and tobacco were free. "Those good people are eating from morning to night," reported St. Pierre. And while he praised the fare, he complained about the price – two shillings a day.

Cape Town's first guest house, of course, was the mud fort, and Van Riebeeck entertained a number of distinguished visitors there. Some behaved badly and broke his plates and glasses. A master of improvisation, Van Riebeeck placed mugs and trenchers made from Hout Bay wood on his table. Then, tiring of his ill-mannered guests, he encouraged his chief gardener's wife, Annetje Boom, to open a house for officers and passengers from ships.

Annetje was already in charge of some of the Company's cows, so that her boarders did not lack milk and butter. Unfortunately they did not stick to milk. Cape Town's first boarding-house saw a great deal of drunken conduct, and soon Annetje was warned that guests would have to give up their knives and daggers before she served them. As an additional precaution, credit was limited to the equivalent of two pence farthing.

Owing to the lack of a suitable inn, one of Cape Town's first large banquets had to be held in the open air. That was in 1666, when the foundations of the Castle were

laid. Masons, carpenters, smiths and the soldiers who had helped them received a present from the Company, thirty rix-dollars for each man, and food for the feast – two oxen, six sheep, a hundred freshly-baked wheaten loaves and eight casks of Cape beer. The meal was cooked and served “on the levelled plain of the aforesaid new fort.” Commander Wagenaar wrote smugly: “This was done with the hope that these sluggish fellows will, by this benevolence, be henceforth better encouraged and made more willing to work.” There was another feast when the Castle was finished, good beef and arrack.

Complaints of the high cost of living come down to us from the early days. Many innkeepers who followed Annetje Boom were accused of charging “without having the fear of God before their eyes.”

Then, as now, sailors spent liberally. They called for a dozen bottles of wine at a time, and they demanded music. If they took their girls for a drive, nothing less than a coach and four would suffice. One old writer remarked: “In their crazy revels these lordly beings scorn to drive in simple fashion.”

There was the same old trouble about getting them back to their ships. They ignored the warning drums and went on drinking long after they had spent their pay. Then, as the writer Bontekoe reported, “they fell into sloops and other craft like ants and came on board closely pursued by innkeepers and alehouse wives

demanding their money in ringing tones.” Shrewd innkeepers took the sailors' clothes as security.

Bontekoe said that knives and rapiers were freely used in tavern brawls. He described one scene: “Yea, they were at each other in mortal combat and severely wounded the innkeeper's wife who attempted to separate them.”

I found a record of a more genial party at which several “men of gentle birth” sent for a drum, a fife, a fiddle and a flute and played the “British Grenadier” tune at four o'clock in the morning.

Sunday dancing at inns was forbidden in the middle of the eighteenth century, but they were open for drinking except during the hours of church service. The innkeeper who allowed cards and dice, however, risked his licence.

Most of Cape Town's eighteenth-century taverns have been lost without trace. Where were Het Lammetje and De Roode Os? Once their sign-boards swung gaily in the south-easter; they vied with De Koning van Pruizen, Het Witte Paard, Het Swart Duifje and other picturesque canteens under thatch. Sparrman the traveller declared that for one shilling and sixpence to two shillings a day the lodger enjoyed “a tolerably good table and attendance none of the worst “

One inn that survived was the All Nations Bar at the corner of Dorp and Bree Streets. The title deeds went back to 1777, and it was not until 1941 that the old building was demolished to make way for an eight-storey factory. Antique collectors watched the house-breakers at work, and carried off hardwood doors with primitive hinges. The old beer cellar had stone walls eighteen inches thick, and much yellow-wood was built into the place by the slave carpenters.

Gone without trace, there was once an inn conducted by Mr. O. Keenehan at No. 1, Wicht Street. It was listed in one of my old Cape Town directories, and it had the most discreet name you could possibly imagine – “I-Never-Say-Nothing-to-Nobody Inn”.

Thunberg, the Swedish botanist, wrote in 1774 that many ships' officers lodged at the house where he was staying. All enjoyed the same table and attendance, but captains had to pay more than mates because their salaries were higher. “The regulation appears to me in many respects equitable as it was handsome and delicate,” he added.

Mrs. van Reenen kept the most comfortable boarding-house in the town at that period, and an English visitor described the establishment. “She was a respectable and opulent widow with two grown-up daughters, rather well-

looking,” he said. “We spent our time looking at the sights and playing billiards. At Mrs. van Reenen's they generally had a dance before retiring to rest.”

Very early last century an Englishman named William Caldwell entered the boarding-house business and announced that he had taken a “spacious and airy house” at 32, Burg Street, opposite Mr. John Pringle, and commanding a delightful view of the Company's gardens. His advertisement ended on this note: “Mr. Caldwell, wishing that the comforts of his house should approach as near as those of a genteel private family as possible, has laid it down as an invariable rule, to admit no late hours or irregularities of any kind.”

Turtle soup was a speciality of the London Hotel in Greenmarket Square, and in 1822 the proprietor announced: “To lovers of good eating – a fine fresh turtle, just arrived from the island of Ascension, will be dressed this morning by a professional cook (late turtle-dresser to His Excellency the late Acting Governor) and sold at the following prices: per pint, 3 rix-dollars; per quart, 5 rix-dollars; per gallon, 20 rix-dollars.” This hotel flourished throughout last century, and in 1865 it was advertising Scotch whisky at half-a-crown a bottle.

For decades last century Cape Town was the sanatorium of British army officers and civil servants on furlough from India. As a class they were more numerous than any other visitors, and they spent freely. Known as “Hindoos”, there were many highly-paid bachelors among them; so that the Cape became a flourishing matrimonial field. Boarding-houses served “tiffin” and Indian dishes for their benefit. There was an “Indian College” at Plumstead where their children went to school. Many of the “Hindoos” patronized a boarding-house in the Keizergracht, and the overflow went to Mrs. van Raikes or Mrs. van Schoor. The “Hindoos” might have left not only their money but a lasting impression on the Cape; but the opening of the Suez Canal robbed Cape Town of this source of profit. After that the “Hindoos” spent their leave in England.

During the heyday of the “Hindoos” an Indian Army officer wrote a booklet called *Hints for a Trip to the Cape*, published in 1844. “Mrs. van Schoor's boarding-house in Strand Street is known to almost everyone who has ever heard of the Cape in the past twenty or thirty years,” he declared. “The terms are nine shillings a day. More steady-going people of the community generally prefer Mrs. Gunn's in Burg Street – a very respectable, religious woman. Liesbeeck Cottage at Rondebosch, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Sanderson, is a very superior house and the leading one among all similar establishments in the country.”

Mrs. van Schoor's boarding-house was patronized by the Abbé de la Caille while he was doing his astronomical work, and the site is marked by a plaque. This famous boarding-house was closed in 1848.

I think the most astonishing dinner ever given in Cape Town was that held at Whittington's Rooms in Longmarket Street on the day the foundation stone of the public library was laid in March, 1858. Thirty Native convicts had worked on the excavations. They were the guests. Maclear, the astronomer, was in the chair. Other distinguished citizens acted as stewards, and the convicts sat down to a first-class meal of joints and plum pudding. Sir George Grey looked in while the guests were wolfing this unexpected fare, and Mr. York, the photographer, took a picture of the historic scene, governor and all.

For public entertainment on a lavish scale one has to go back to May, 1863, when Cape Town celebrated the wedding of the Prince of Wales more royally than any other town in the colony.

“From daylight on the wedding day to daylight of the next there was one incessant round of festivities,” wrote one of the revellers. “Not a private residence was closed. It was open house throughout the city. Hotels and public houses were thronged. Salutes were fired, bands paraded the streets. Britannia, Neptune, Bacchus, Lady Godiva, all the trades, societies and schools took part in a

procession two miles long. Oxen were roasted whole on the Parade, and the poor feasted there at the cost of the municipality. The bride cake for the Governor's table was so large that it took a wagon and a span of oxen to convey it to Government House."

Among the oddities of Cape Town catering I must include a Harbour Board banquet to celebrate the opening of the graving dock in 1882. Members of both Houses of Parliament attended. Appropriately enough, it was held on the floor of the graving dock.

CAPE TOWN'S first hotels, in anything like the modern sense of the word, were the George and Parkes' Hotel. Built before 1800, Parkes' Hotel stood at the corner of the Heerengracht and Strand Street (where the Grand Hotel was pulled down in 1950). It was the resort of master mariners in the days of sail; they had their "captains' rooms" there and a garden at the corner where they sat yarning in the open air.

Sir George Napier (1846) paid this tribute to Parkes' Hotel: "It commands a view of the pines, the finest pine grove I ever beheld, on the Parade square. It is the best hotel in Cape Town, the 'Clarendon' of the Cape. I enjoyed the civility of Mrs. Parkes and the kind attentions of her pretty daughters."

Parkes' Hotel vanished in the eighteen-nineties and the Grand was built on the site. Some of those who saw the four-storeyed Grand arise lived to see it pulled down in 1950, to be replaced by a ten-storeyed hotel. In accordance with Victorian ideas of decoration, two statues were placed in niches in the walls of the Grand. They were Bacchus, god of wine, and Persephone, goddess of spring. The manager of the hotel rescued them from the rubble and carried them off to his own garden. More people will study them there than ever they did when the statues brooded over busy Strand Street.

Beneath the Grand Hotel the builders found an oak barrel containing middle-seventeenth century glass flagons with collars to keep the leather stoppers in place. (Corks had not yet arrived.) A spoon of the same period, with a pewter handle, brass bowl and Dutch crest, and a number of keys, clay pipes and cannon balls, were also discovered.

St. George's Hotel in St. George's Street was sixty years old when it was demolished in 1934 to make way for a huge insurance building. In the 'seventies the proprietor announced a pleasant novelty – “a bar separate from the hotel, so that ladies calling on their lady friends from the country will not be inconvenienced by having to pass through a bar to go to the drawing-room.”

Tommy Mulvihall, that famous old horseman (whose Irish parents opened Cape Town's first mineral water factory), bought the St. George's very early this century. In that boom period he gladly paid £50,000 for it and refused an offer of £75,000 soon afterwards. During the slump that followed the South African War he was glad to accept £33,000.

“The best thing for the inside of a man is the outside of a horse,” Tommy Mulvihall used to say. Racing men flocked to the St. George's, and there were many military patrons. Once a kilted Highlander drew his revolver in the bar, but was persuaded to leave by a resourceful barman. In the street, however, the Highlander blazed away until his revolver was empty. He killed no one, but when the military police arrested him he had a number of minor casualties to answer for.

When the Clifton Hotel was opened in 1902 one newspaper pointed out: “It must also be remembered that there is not one of those South African abominations attached to this hotel, namely a ‘Tap’, so that visitors are not likely to be disturbed by any unseemly noise.”

I watched the housebreakers pulling down the Clifton Hotel last year. They were doing their work with unusual care, taking the place apart brick by brick, searching every corner as the old plaster fell. There was a reason.

Years ago a man suspected of having illicit diamonds worth £25,000 in his possession was arrested in the hotel. The parcel was never found, but the housebreakers did not intend to miss such a hoard. I regret to have to add that their labour was in vain.

IT TOOK Cape Town a long time to realize that there might be a public for an unlicensed place of refreshment. Madame Wronsky was one of the pioneers. She gave up her bun shop in Plein Street in 1884 to open the first Adderley Street cafe. It was a success from the start, and before long fashionable Cape Town was taking coffee and cream at Wronsky's at four in the afternoon. Madame kept open at night and on Sundays. She served after-theatre suppers, and as she could seat only forty customers at a time the cafe always had a flourishing air.

Madame Wronsky employed a clever confectioner named Heinrich Kamp, and before the end of the century he acquired the business. Kamp preferred waiters to waitresses and served favoured customers himself. Clubs met upstairs, where smoking was permitted and grills were prepared. Amateur actors met there on Sunday evenings, and this room was also the scene of many an early chess tournament. Barristers patronized Kamp's, and all the

personalities of the Old Cape House were to be seen there. The room, with its large windows, red velvet sofas against the walls, and gilt mirrors, is remembered fondly by people still middle-aged. It was not until the end of 1909 that Kamp's closed down.

Mr. Harry Dix entered the cafe field later than Madame Wronsky, though an earlier Dix had started with a bun shop where schoolboys could drink ginger beer. Dix's became a great Cape Town rendezvous at the end of last century, and in 1901 a patron wrote this glowing description: "If you don't know Dix's you don't know Cape Town. You enter a bright, well-appointed shop liberally stocked with tooth-watering delicacies, piles of pastry and rows of sweets in glittering glasses. Ascending a massive staircase you find yourself in the cosy Moorish room, or by going through a winding passage you enter the Oak room in Longmarket Street. The Moorish room has a rich fabric lining, and an orchestra plays at the entrance. The stripling officer who has never been nearer the front than Adderley Street, and who has only smelt powder in rouge form, swaggers in with his cane and cigarette and cracks some joke. The first of the month (Treasury Day) is always signalled by a troop of shop assistants who go the pace for a day or two."

Cape Town's judges and barristers said a reluctant farewell in September, 1950, to a tea-room in Wale Street known affectionately as the “Sharks' Den.” They had refreshed themselves there for thirty years, and the demolition of the building left them with a problem. Through the years this place had gained the sort of traditional, intimate atmosphere one finds in certain small London tea-rooms.

From this café, every day for five weeks in 1948, a special lunch was sent across to the cells below the Supreme Court. It was the lunch for Mrs. Lee, the poisoner.

CAPE TOWN waited a long time for its first club. There was the “Societeit Huis” or “Heeren Huis” at Sea Point as far back as 1766, of course, but this was a country club, and it does not seem to have lasted long. The Queens Hotel now occupies the site.

During the First British Occupation the Concordia Club was started in town by thirty-six members. “It has no other intention but to pass leisure hours in the company of good men in a harmless and agreeable manner,” stated the founders. “All kinds of political discussion and gambling shall be prohibited.” Nevertheless, General Dundas had his doubts about it, and thought it might be a meeting place for men inspired by French revolutionary ideas.

Concordia Street, behind St. Mary's Cathedral, still reminds us of this first town club. Each member paid an entrance fee of forty rix-dollars (£8) and placed twenty-five bottles of wine in the cellar. The monthly subscription of twelve shillings helped to pay the slave stewards. Billiards cost two pence by day and an extra penny at night for the candles. A skittle alley was also provided and there was a library. Every year members placated their wives by giving a ball and supper.

In the Heerengracht a famous early nineteenth-century club was the African Club, favoured by officers of the garrison. Whist and other games of chance were played. "These were believed to be the cause of throwing many of the members into distressed circumstances while they enriched others", remarked a writer. "The charm of the house lies in its situation, so prime for gossip, being in the centre of the Heerengracht, traversed by everyone going to the Parade, to the Government offices, to the Custom House or to the wharf; so that between the hours of eleven and five, almost everyone may be seen from the doors of this house."

A newspaper report of another Heerengracht club said that it provided members with "beer, billiards, brandy, bitters and beds". Cape Town had the club habit by the eighteen-thirties, for another newspaper declared: "Fashionable clubs are

springing up like toadstools from the rank soil of luxury, idleness and sensuality.” The writer traced many unhappy marriages to the clubs.

ONE catering comer of Cape Town which always interested me was the building in Newmarket Street built by the Cape Government Railways in 1904 to supply the dining cars. There I studied the art of housekeeping on wheels. I am just old enough to remember the days when few trains in South Africa had dining cars. The cold chicken, and the tea we made over a methylated spirit stove, were good – but the modern dining car is better.

First the Newmarket Street cellars. The South African wine industry owes much to the railways; for in the dining cars nearly everyone orders those “nip” bottles which are so hard to find elsewhere. Sherry, port, claret and burgundy types are tasted and selected by an expert for bottling in the railway cellars.. The white hock types are most popular in the dining cars, for red wines do not travel so well. Delicate imported wines such as Chateau Laffite are reserved for the station restaurants; the rattling of the trains would shake all the magic out of them.

A storekeeper told me that he had seen twelve thousand bottles of beer and minerals sent on board the trains during one busy morning. He showed me a large section of the cellar filled with well-stocked wine bins – one month's supply. In the

general store upstairs sixty thousand beer glasses awaited inevitable destruction. Breakages of crockery, however, have been reduced in recent years by supplying the saloons with vitrified ware instead of china. All copper cooking vessels have now been withdrawn and the railway chefs use aluminium pots. Almost every day a fragrant tide of fresh food swept through this store as the dining cars were provisioned. Within two hours an empty dining car became a movable island of abundance.

Standard menus have been drawn up for all the dining cars; but within these limits there is much scope for the ingenuity of the chef. I was shown a list of all the dishes likely to be prepared in a railway dining car, with their Afrikaans names. Some of the forty-four soups are fascinating. Crème Africaine would blend well with a Hex River sunset; while Potage Fausse Tortue might sharpen the appetite of inland exiles bound for the sea. There are sixty different sweet courses, starting with compote of apples and custard and ending (more magnificently) with Pears Melba.

Dining cars are stocked for emergencies. There is always a cupboard full of tinned milk and other foods to draw upon if an accident or wash away delays the train for days. "It should then be the particular aim of the catering staff to rise to the occasion and endeavour to minimize, as far as lies within their power, any

discomforts which passengers may be experiencing,” suggests the official handbook.

The railway caterers have a new £230,000 building on the Cape Town foreshore, and the Newmarket Street depot has been abandoned. We have travelled a long way indeed from the comic railway buns and the ham sandwiches under glass covers.

IF YOU have never met Mr. L. A. Ying then you have missed somebody. Mr. Ying is the brains behind the Golden Dragon, the restaurant in a century-old Bree Street building where, for the past five years, adventurous South Africans have been learning to use chopsticks. Golden Dragon is a favourite restaurant name in China. Step inside, and you find Chinese scenes (painted by an Italian artist), camphor-wood chests – and the incense of burning joss-sticks if you ask for it.

I dined there and talked to Mr. Ying for an hour. Now I know something about Chinese cookery, but nothing of the Golden Dragon's secrets. “My cook would not like me to tell,” smiles Mr. Ying when you ask too many penetrating questions.

You may think that Chinese dishes are weird, just as the Chinese regard knives and forks as barbaric. “We sit at table to eat, not to cut up carcasses.” says Mr. Ying. “Chopsticks are much better, after the cook has done the cutting.”

Mr. Ying shelled a pod of peas and picked them up with his ivory chopsticks. “Definitely easier than knife and fork,” pointed out Mr. Ying. With everything shredded, a Chinese meal is easy to digest. I must say that the Golden Dragon cuisine agreed with me far better than previous Chinese meals in Limehouse, New York, Calcutta, Rangoon and Port Louis, Mauritius.

At the Golden Dragon I started with tong, a chicken soup. Then came chow yee pinn, fish flakes with yung chow funn or fried rice. This was the most savoury rice I had tasted for a long time. Mr. Ying sometimes provides slices of red stump nose with carraway seed and pickled ginger. The fish is raw, but you would never guess it.

Po lo gaay is the next course – chicken with pineapple. If you have a gigantic appetite there is chop suey mein to follow, a large plate of noodles. The meal ends with conventional sweets and coffee, in deference to Western custom. Chop suey, by the way, means “mixed fragments” and is not a truly

Chinese dish. A “chop suey joint” is a place where the American weary of his own food can find something different.

Chinese are the world's greatest vegetable consumers. Green peas are eaten when very young, shell and all. Potatoes are not often served, and when they do appear they are finely grated and fried. Such unusual but appetizing items as seaweed and tiger lilies fall under the heading of Chinese vegetables. One must not forget the soya bean, foundation of Chinese flavours and colours. You find a little round bowl of soya bean sauce on every table at the Golden Dragon.

Bread is absent from the Golden Dragon tables, for the Chinese are not bread eaters. They take their wheat in the form of noodles; or they may eat boiled or steamed wheat. In a land of abundant rice, bread is superfluous.

You can have tea flavoured with chrysanthemum petals at the Golden Dragon, or the jasmine tea of Peiping or litchi tea. They make their tea in the familiar way, but Chinese tea-drinkers throw away the first infusion and drink the second.

Mr. Ying is able to provide more exotic Chinese dishes for those who like them. He visited China some time ago and flew back after securing further supplies of preserved eggs, birds'-nest soup and other delicacies.

“All bluff,” says Mr. Ying when you question him about the hundred-year eggs. The best time to eat lime-preserved ducks' eggs is after only a hundred days of seasoning. Then they have turned hard and black (but not bad) inside, and the flavour is exquisite. Such an egg costs a shilling nowadays by the time it has reached Cape Town – and there is a hundred-day egg shortage.

Birds' nests are even more expensive. The bird that produces them is a sea swallow. It is not a nest of twigs, as you might imagine, but a shallow, transparent, gelatinous, cup-shaped nest formed of fish and the saliva of the bird. It must be soaked for one day, and the soup takes another full day to prepare. The flavour is subtle, and is enhanced by the addition of chicken. Mr. Ying showed me a cardboard box containing enough nests to serve sixteen people, price five guineas. You can reduce the price by half if you import powdered nests; but the Chinese gourmet likes his nests whole.

Octopus makes an appetizing soup, and the Golden Dragon sometimes serves the local tschokka (squid) as a tender fried dish. Shark's fins go into soup. Mr. Ying admits that the Cape shark's fins are edible, but he finds them hard to prepare. The tail may also be used. Clear chicken or clear meat soup is added to the shark's fin after hours of boiling.

Fortunately our crawfish is approved by Chinese epicures, though the Golden Dragon deals with it in a manner very different from the all-to-common and flavourless mayonnaise of the European chef. After fried crawfish with vegetables in the Chinese style you will not want cold crawfish again. Mr. Ying's chefs use only the legs. They call lobsters "dragon shrimps" in China. Fooyung is Chinese for omelette, and prawns make a good filling. Mr. Ying finds it difficult to get South African prawns fresh enough for his purpose, so that deep-frozen prawns from America are used. Beche-de-mer, the succulent sea-slug of so many Chinese recipes, is not popular in Cape Town.

You must have bamboo shoots at a Chinese meal. A few people grow them in the Cape Peninsula for their own use, but Mr. Ying likes the very young roots that come from China in tins.

Fish oil plays an important role in the Chinese cuisine. For roast duck, honey is used to make the skin crisp. Roast almonds or walnuts go well with shredded chicken. Mushrooms are essential. Here again Mr. Ying insists upon tinned or dried mushrooms grown on special farms in China. Dried winter mushrooms cost 45s. a pound now. In China, says Mr. Ying, you get huge mushrooms stuffed with minced chicken. Oysters, too, but the Cape oysters are too small to be stuffed.

Abalones, which we call perlemoen, demand great skill in the kitchen or they are tough. The Chinese season them with meat or poultry, but the tender abalone is another Chinese secret.

Mr. Ying was dining with a Chinese friend some time ago when a marvellous beefsteak was placed on the table. He carried the recipe back to the Golden Dragon. I pointed out to Mr. Ying that many housewives would be grateful for this recipe, but as usual he replied politely: "I don't know whether my cook will permit me. All I can say is that the secret is in the seasoning."

Chinese cooks pay attention not only to the colour and flavour of foodstuffs, but to the texture – the crispness and effect on the teeth. The right mixture is carefully studied. Food is taken as seriously as it is in France, and it is possible that even the French have something to learn from the Chinese.

I like the Golden Dragon, and I shall go there again. Mr. Ying's parting remark lingers in my mind. "I am a very cautious man, but next time I shall be more friendly," he promised. Next time I am going to find out how Mr. Ying's cook makes a steak tender. The secret is in the seasoning, remember, and that is a Chinese secret.

GREEK CAFÉS and restaurants have been established in Cape Town for more than half a century. Yet how seldom does one encounter the genuine Greek cuisine—those interesting Mediterranean dishes which the Greeks prepare for their own enjoyment.

I used to take a glass of ouzo with my hors d'oeuvres at Taverna, the leading Greek restaurant in Cairo; and then go on to crawfish or mutton served in the Greek way, with a pint of Attica or Mount Parnassus to accompany the meal. Thus I was glad to rediscover Greek food in Cape Town. Now I have my octopus or pastitsio every week. I had a complete Greek dinner one night. Ouzo, the aperitif I had tasted in Cairo, is now made by Greek wine farmers in the Kuils River district, to the delight of their fellow-countrymen all over the Union. It is a colourless spirit which becomes milky when you add water; and the flavour is of aniseed. With the ouzo came a dish of black olives; the white goat cheese called *feta*, a highly-flavoured cheese which is now made in South Africa; radishes and almonds.

Soupa Avgholemono, or lemon soup, was served that night, a traditional soup of strong chicken broth thickened with rice, and with egg yolks and lemon juice added. My friends looked a little alarmed when the next course arrived, but they soon lost their prejudices. It was squid, the local tschokka which I had tasted

previously at the Chinese restaurant. This time it was stuffed with rice, braised with onion and tomato, and prepared in white wine. A delicious course.

If you are inclined to turn up your nose at squid or octopus, please remember that our popular crawfish is simply a huge sea spider.

Tender globe artichokes were served with the squid. This is a rare vegetable in Cape Town, but one which the Greeks grow for themselves and cook to perfection after soaking in lemon juice and water.

The main dish was venison, cooked in red wine with whole pickled onions and flavoured with bay leaves, allspice and the right trace of garlic. Done in this way, the toughest venison falls apart. Yiaourt, the healthy sour milk of the Balkans, and Turkish coffee, rounded off one of the most satisfying and unusual meals I have had in Cape Town.

On other occasions I have sampled pickled octopus and pilaff of octopus. Unfortunately there is a shortage of octopus in these waters. I never miss it when it is available.

Taramosalata is a fish appetizer to remember. It is made of salted, concentrated fish roe (genuine caviar if possible) creamed with olive oil, lemon juice and bread-crumbs. Little fritters of mussels mixed with butter and fried in oil make another

fine appetizer. A more conventional Greek fish course, however, is a harder or other small fish baked whole in olive oil and water with chopped onions, chopped tomatoes and garlic.

Lamb is the favourite meat of the Greeks. Some of their ways of cooking it reveal a Turkish origin, and *kebabs* are similar to our sosaties. Squares of lamb or mutton are skewered and grilled on an open fire. *Tas kebab* is cooked in red wine, onion and tomato, delicately spiced and served with a mound of rice which has been browned in butter. With the *kebab* comes a salad of raw, shredded cabbage, beetroot, beans, black olives and capers, dressed with oil and vinegar. Another national dish consists of little rolls of minced mutton wrapped in vine leaves, cooked in butter and served with the traditional thick egg and lemon sauce.

Macaroni pastitsio, which ranks high in the Greek cuisine (and certainly has my approval), is formed with layers of macaroni and mincemeat, lots of good cheese, a hint of cinnamon and a rich bechamel sauce to cover the top before browning in the oven.

Sweet green peppers are sometimes stuffed with meat and accompanied by stuffed whole tomatoes, all baked in the oven. Brinjals are among the favourite vegetables.

I could go on telling you of *kotopoulo bamies*, the Greek chicken dish; of *musaca patates* (meat and potatoes in tomatoes in tomato puree); of Greek shortbread' and spiced cake. But this is making me hungry.

Greeks prefer the continental breakfast of coffee and rolls, but the remaining two meals of the day are substantial. As I have shown, they have found local versions of many of their national delicacies, and a Greek dinner in Cape Town can be almost as typical as a meal in an Athens tavern. The extraordinary thing, to my mind, is that with so many outstanding dishes of their own, they have been content for so many years to hand out steak and chips to South Africans.

CHAPTER 6

HEERENGRACHT

EVERYONE knows that until the anti-convict agitation of a century ago Adderley Street was the Heerengracht. Not so many realize that South Africa's oldest street had two much earlier names. It started as Burgwal; and when the first solid houses appeared it was called Voorste Straat. In those days there was also a Heere Straat in honour of the "Heeren Meesters", the directors of the Dutch East India Company. Heere Straat seems to have run along the route of the present Castle Street.

Voorste Straat fell into disuse as a name when the canal was built. People naturally referred to the "gragt" and it was only in 1743 that the more dignified name of Heerengracht was bestowed. It remained for more than a century, though official documents spelt it in eighteen different ways.

It may surprise some to hear that after twelve years as Adderley Street the Town Council passed a resolution changing the name back to Heerengracht. Mr. C. B. Adderley, the hero of 1850, was denounced because he had opposed a scheme under which Britain undertook to pay for the defence of her colonies. *The Cape Argus* ridiculed the change, the motion was rescinded, and Adderley Street remained firmly in favour.

Apart from the old masonry of the Dutch Reformed Church there is little left in the street to remind us of Heerengracht days. Even the facade of the slave lodge is a mere £20,000 replica, built in recent years when the front was lopped off to widen the top of Adderley Street. Thus it needs a strong imagination to picture the Fresh River winding down to the sea. Indeed it is a long time since vegetables were planted on the banks and huts arose along the unspoilt watercourse. Wouter Mostert the miller was the first builder on this historic ground, for he made a stone channel between the reservoir and the point where seamen filled their water-casks.

Not until early last century did the main street become anything of a shopping centre. Booksellers were among the pioneer shopkeepers. By 1830 there were ten shops, and the smart people were still having their wigs made by Lodewyk, corner of Shortmarket and Heerengracht. Lodewyk charged by the year for haircuts – four rix-dollars.

The busy lower end of the Heerengracht certainly made an unfavourable impression on newcomers, for the odours of a beach littered with garbage mingled with the smells of the shambles. There, too, was the infamous old gaol with its treadmill section jutting into the street and blocking the view of the sea. In 1849 this obstruction was removed.

Malay barbers attended to coolies in the open air. Auctions were held under the trees. Bain the tobacconist gave the street a picturesque touch with his brightly-painted trade sign, a wooden Highlander taking snuff. Wrecked ships were broken up for the timber at the foot of the street.

“Sam Sly” (W. L. Sammons, the bookseller and journalist) complained bitterly of the open canal soon after he landed in 1843. When he suggested that it should be covered over, people replied: “It would bring in no more skillings or stivers.” He found the outlook of the Heerengracht too mercenary for his liking. “For the immense business that has been carried on in this locality for many years, the name of Heerengracht must be famous with every merchant and tradesman in the world,” wrote Sammons. “Everything in Cape Town is decided by money. Yet there is a certain beauty and charm about the houses, with their quaint and disuniform fronts and sizes and lively green window shutters and frames.” Thirteen years after the arrival of “Sam Sly” the reeking canal was arched over.

As late as the 'fifties an Adderley Street building was occupied by the International Commission which disposed of ships rounded up by the Royal Navy for slave trading. Cape Town was supplied largely by ox-wagon. Every day the wagons that had toiled from as far away as Worcester,

Tulbagh and Ceres deposited their grain and forage, foodstuffs and wine, on the high stoeps of Adderley Street. Private houses were giving way to shops and offices in 1860, but cocks still crowed in a number of yards. Many of the fir trees had been cut down in the belief that mosquitoes bred in the branches. Sentries still patrolled the Avenue entrance night and day.

That was the period when railways, tramways and the harbour were being planned. Passengers by sea still landed at the foot of Adderley Street and saw a one-sided thoroughfare with the southeaster blowing into it across the Parade with force unchecked. A street of shawls and crinolines and parasols, top-hats and frockcoats – and the hansom-cabs that have survived to this day.

My street directory for 1865 shows No. 1, Adderley Street as the Crown Inn, still there in modern form. There were only forty-six numbers, including three jewellers, two chemists, several shipping- agents, William Cairncross the pastry cook, drapers, tailors and the American Consulate. There was also an F. Canterbury, hairdresser, son of the celebrated Hendrik Canterbury whose name is perpetuated in Canterbury Street. The father, a hairdresser who flourished during the first quarter of the century, was a gossip in the grand manner. He spread so

many rumours that a common term of disbelief used in Cape Town was: “That's a Canterbury.”

One of the characters of Adderley Street for forty years last century was Captain James Murison, who died in 1885. He and his partner Anderson conducted their shipping business on the present Union-Castle site, in an old-fashioned house with a small stoep and tiny windows. Captain Murison was a Member of the Legislative Council for fifteen years; but this independent Scot never identified himself with any party. He left £128,000.

Adderley Street was the Fleet Street of Cape Town in the 'eighties. Six newspapers (including *The Cape Argus*) had their offices there. But one of the main impressions was still that of an Eastern town of one and two-storeyed buildings with flat roofs. Old residents have told me, however, that Adderley Street had a “whiter look” during the last decades of last century. Coloured people made up only one-third of the city's population. Natives were comparatively rare:

A forgotten ceremony in Adderley Street which caused a stir in 1896 was the departure of the first electric tram for Mowbray. This was evidently regarded in the same light as the launching of a ship, for Lady Sivewright broke a bottle of champagne over the bows.

Adderley Street lost some of its glamour for me when the flower-sellers were forced out. On their traditional pitch in the main street their bath tubs of blazing colour had a publicity value of many thousands a year. No tourist ever forgot them. Flower selling was easier in the days before veld flowers were protected. Disas and proteas lasted longer, too, and cost less than garden flowers. Protection was necessary, but it cut heavily into the earnings of the flower-sellers. One who makes a clear profit of £1, even on a Saturday, is in luck at the present time. During the Christmas season, however, a £15 day is not unknown. You can find three generations on one pitch among the flower-sellers, grandmothers who started last century still sitting in the wind beside their tin baths. They were a landmark, the Adderley Street flower-sellers, memorable as Table Mountain.

SAUNTERING DOWN Adderley Street on the evening of June 12, 1905, a police constable noticed smoke and small blue flames on the surface of the roadway outside Stuttaford's. He called the fire brigade. By the time the firemen arrived there was nothing unusual to be seen. They sprinkled sand on the spot indicated by the constable and drove off puzzled.

Next morning dawned fine after a spell of rain, and Adderley Street was well filled with women shoppers. The mail steamer had arrived early that

day, and many of the hansom-cabs had returned to the ranks after carrying passengers from the docks. At 10.23 a.m., however, there was little traffic moving in the street. Only one tramcar was to be seen at that moment.

At 10.23 a.m. Adderley Street blew up. The report was so loud, the concussion so frightening, that even people far away guessed that this was not ordinary blasting but a disaster. They were right. Two more explosions followed. When the smoke cleared it was seen that Adderley Street had been torn up as though by an earthquake. Cab-drivers had been flung from their seats and maddened horses were racing off with the hansoms.

The next dramatic spectacle was a huge spout of water which burst from the street opposite the General Post Office and rose to a height of forty feet. Broken tramway cables fell amid flashes of blue flame, and hundreds ran to escape the live wires. The street at Cartwright's corner looked as though a bomb had fallen. There was a crater, and granite blocks lay in heaps.

Once the first shock had passed, Adderley Street was closed to traffic and people turned to aid the victims. Captain Sylvester of the s.s. *German* saw a woman's hand protruding from the wreckage and rubble near the General Post Office. He called to the onlookers for help, and stones weighing two cwt. were carefully removed. To his dismay, Captain Sylvester found that

the woman was a Miss Mabel Stacey, one of his passengers during the voyage just ended; a trained nurse on her way to Rhodesia.

Miss Stacey was taken to a chemist and then to the New Somerset Hospital, but she died within two hours. A woman friend who was crossing the road with her when the explosion occurred was unhurt. She said that Miss Stacey simply vanished from her side, and for some time she was astounded at her disappearance.

Nine other people, including five cab-drivers, were injured. There would have been many more casualties but for the fact that most people were on the pavements and it was the roadway that collapsed. Scores of people had narrow escapes. A man and his wife were dug out of a hole in front of the General Post Office, suffering only from bruises and shock. Many windows were broken and the telephone service was disrupted.

“It was as though a big gun had been fired in the street,” said one citizen. “The tram lines were lifted out of their bed and stood several feet above road level.”

Public opinion demanded an inquiry, and the government appointed an expert commission. It was found that the explosion had been caused by a mixture of coal gas, water gas and air in the sewer beneath Adderley Street.

This was, in fact, the old, covered Heerengracht that had reminded twentieth-century Cape Town of its presence. At one time the covered canal had been open to the sea. Then the sea end was blocked, and a sealed subterranean chamber was formed. It was proved that coal gas had escaped into this chamber, and that the gas company's officials had searched unsuccessfully for the leak.

Shortly before the explosion, tramway men had been welding the joints of the rails in Adderley Street. They would never have used their blowlamps so light-heartedly if they had known that they were working only a few feet above a high-pressure mixture of dangerous gases. Those “small blue flames” seen by the constable on the previous evening were explained at last.

There was a court sequel when the post office authorities claimed £933 from the Town Council and gas company for damaged telephone wires. They were awarded £800. Old sewers were filled in as a result of the disaster, and Adderley Street has remained free from gas explosions since that unlucky thirteenth of June.

CAPE TOWN'S oldest and largest square once had the Heerengracht as one of its boundaries. The modern Grand Parade is much smaller than the seventeenth-century market place, certainly far too small for Cape Town's motorists. Formerly it stretched from the Castle to the Heerengracht, from the Keizergracht (now Darling Street) to the sea. Van Riebeeck built his mud fort on the site, but that soon disappeared. All through the eighteenth century the Parade remained wide open.

It was a place of gullies and koppies, and it gained the name of Parade in 1697, when the ground was levelled. Then the first troops drilled there; and parades were held until the military were driven out by the motor-car.

Cape Town has often had to defend its Parade vigorously against encroachments. The Burgher Senate was busy resisting building schemes two and a half centuries ago. In the end it had to submit to the construction of a wall through the centre, so that the Parade became half military and half market. There the Dutch garrison fell in with muskets, powder-horns and drums when the Lion's Head look-out reported foreign ships. French regiments and Hottentot Pandours were succeeded by British red-coats and the khaki-clad soldiers of our own time. On the other side of the early wall the Cape's pioneer farmers outspanned their wagons and displayed their

wares – buck and brandy, aloes and ivory, porcupines and tortoises as well as mutton and fruit.

It was Cape Town's promenade on Sundays and holidays, and there are some fine old prints revealing the scene in the crinoline days. Before the Parade was paved, however, the south-easter blew up so much dust that no one could stand the discomfort. Stone pines were planted along the boundaries 150 years ago, and the Parade was enclosed by a low wall. Cattle grazed there and horsemen cantered under the trees. The pines have gone, but traces of the wall are still to be seen at the Castle end.

First encroachment on the Parade was the Commercial Exchange, opened in 1822. It faced the Heerengracht, a handsome single-storeyed building with a portico of Corinthian pillars. For exactly seventy years it stood there, scene of many a brilliant dinner and famous public meeting. Then it was demolished to make way for the General Post Office. In the Commercial Exchange in 1851 were assembled the Cape's exhibits for the forthcoming London Exhibition of the industries of all nations. It was a pathetic display – two bales of wool, some wild ostrich feathers, mealie cobs, preserved fruits, a box of cigars and a rough chair supposed to have been used by Dingaan. A much later show revealed the same weakness. There was a

solitary bottle of chutney and a book-case made in the colony from imported wood. *The Cape Argus* called it “a crushing exposure of our national laziness”.

Cape Town's first agricultural shows were held on the Parade, but the early efforts were not impressive. A clergyman who attended the 1855 show wrote: “I shall never forget that show, for I had some difficulty in finding it at all. At last I saw a couple of dozen well-dressed gentlemen standing round something at a corner of the Parade, and I found one imported bull – Dutch breed – three cows in milk and half a dozen heifers, none of them showing breed of any sort; two pairs of horses in harness and three colts; a pile of turnips, about five cabbages, heartless but immensely leafy, and some bundles of oat-hay. There were about as many judges as there were exhibits, and I overheard one of the exhibitors say to one of the judges: 'Don't forget my cow'.”

The second encroachment on the Parade was the Standard Bank. After that came the Opera House, and the extension of Plein Street towards the railway station cut across the old square and helped on the shrinking process.

Political meetings have been held on the Parade for more than a century. It was there, of course, that all Cape Town gathered in a winter gale in 1849, and stood for hours while the orators of the Anti-Convict League organized the fight that sent the *Neptune* on to Australia. Last century the Parade watched Fifth of November celebrations year after year – old wagons filled with tar, lighting up the faces of the revellers.

Cape Town changed the name of the Heerengracht by consent, but it would not tolerate any tampering with the name of the Parade. Foolishly the municipality tried to alter it to Prince Alfred's Square during Prince Alfred's visit in 1860; but the public refused to accept the new name, and now there is only a Prince Alfred's Lane to commemorate the event.

Through all changes and vicissitudes, the auctioneers and salesmen of the Parade clung tenaciously to their time-honoured stalls. Almost everything that can be sold has been sold on that historic ground. Prefabricated houses were being made in the middle of last century. One was sold on the Parade at that time for £103 – three rooms of papier mache, “capable of holding a small family.”

The *Settler's Guide* by W. Irwin, published in 1858, had this description of the Parade scene: “It is to the Cape folk what market days are in England.

Hundreds of persons congregate round the auctioneers' stands, six of whom are selling at the same time. They do an immense business, disposing of commodities from all parts of the world, damaged cargoes, stale shop goods, clearings-out of warehouses, sea captains' adventures, unlucky speculations, bankrupts' and insolvents' effects, furniture, china, plate, crockery, hardware, paintings and engravings, eatables, confectionery, perfumery, clothes, tools, seeds, trees, horses and carts, carriages and harness, wine, oil, hides and skins. Duty paid to the Government during the year amounts to £25,000 to £30,000. There are no other gatherings of equal liveliness in Cape Town."

Forty years ago, early motor-cars were mingling with ox-wagons on the Parade. The greatest transformation of all had begun. But the Malays were still wearing their straw hats, hucksters were selling Basuto ponies and meerkats, musical boxes and penguin eggs.

Characters have always flourished among the quick-witted stallholders of the Parade. Mrs. Wilhelmina Kleinsmidt, the herb seller who died in 1949, made such a huge and memorable figure that Tretchikoff painted her among the array of buchu, roots and bushes she sold. This is a family trade, like flower-selling. Early this century Mrs. Kleinsmidt's father came in from

Stellenbosch and started the herb-selling pitch. He taught his daughters the secrets of wormwood and wilde als, platwortel and stinkblaar. So when he died in 1911, a daughter, Mrs. Maria Blinker, was ready to take charge of the business. She sat there in all weathers for twenty-eight years, and Mrs. Kleinsmidt took over when she passed on. Mrs. Kleinsmidt's daughter now carries on the traditional trade in fragrant medicinal herbs.

Nathan Kaplan was the oldest Parade merchant at the time of his death a few years ago. Born in Russia, he settled in Cape Town in 1895 and became an expert in second-hand books, pots, pans and antique jewellery.

Are bargains still to be found at the Parade sales and on the stalls? Shrewd buyers seem to think so. I remember a friend who bid for a plot of land he had never seen, and discovered that he had come into possession of one of the finest sites on the Hout Bay mountainside.

Cape documents, priceless from the historian's point of view, have been sold by the barrow-load on the Parade. Some have been lost for ever. Sir George Cory rescued a large consignment in 1909 and presented it to the Archives. Old Cape almanacs, now worth pounds, were once sold on the Parade for a shilling apiece. Books by all the old travellers, rare books with colour plates, have been offered there at a small fraction of the prices secured for

such works today. One book-lover declared that he had formed a magnificent library of five hundred volumes by careful buying every Wednesday and Saturday morning on the Parade for four years. He was there at seven, well before the crowd, he spent £10 on the whole collection, and the books, from Homer onwards, were worth £150. You need luck and knowledge to achieve a success like that. The oldest square in Cape Town has seen much larger ventures, many a fortune made and lost.

CHAPTER 7

SATURDAY NIGHT IN PLEIN STREET

FARMERS who came in with their wagons during the first half century of the Cape settlement used as their uitspan a large open space called De Plein van De Kaap. It stretched from the present Buitengracht Street to the Dutch Reformed Church in the Heerengracht and leading out of it was a little street called De Naauwe Gracht.

Along this “narrow canal” settled some of the first Huguenots. The Rev. Henricus Beck carried on his missionary activities from that street. It grew in importance and became De Groote Pleijn Straat. Such is the origin of our teeming Plein Street.

Somehow the shoddy Victorian architecture of Plein Street has not the same lacy charm which Long Street contrives to display in the right light. Plein Street also reveals an Edwardian influence, prosperous and vulgar. It is a street of pillars and pilasters and balustrades, ground glass and gilded lettering. Only when you emerge into the sunlight of Stal Plein do you rediscover the Cape architecture that Plein Street has lost.

As far back as anyone can remember, Plein Street has been a flourishing street of shops. Even in 1865, the date of my street directory, most of the

residents had been pushed out in the interests of trade. At No. 1, however, dwelt Lawrence Kannemeyer, a former slave who probably used his freedom to better personal advantage than any other coloured man of the period. Before he died he had become owner of the Hotel d'Europe (later the Royal Hotel), a posting master to Her Majesty, and proprietor of the once-famous livery stable. It was a fortune founded on deep knowledge of horseflesh. Close to Kannemeyer were the Joseph brothers, clothing merchants, and Rogerson the tea merchant. W. L. Sammons, editor of *Sam Sly's Journal*, a critical and humorous sheet, kept his bookshop at No. 18.

There was a bowling saloon in Plein Street, an auctioneer, a wagon proprietor and an ivory turner, and many types of tradesmen who are still to be found there. But apart from the Widow Graham's boarding-house there were not more than half a dozen dwellings. Plein Street was making money.

In the early 'eighties Plein Street was doing business on Saturday nights. "Shops, restaurants, cafés and bars were all wide open until eleven or twelve o'clock," remarked a writer. "I firmly believe that each one of them did as much business that night as all the other establishments in the other streets of the town put together."

Cape Town honoured that custom until about a quarter of a century ago. Plein Street on Saturday night was one of the liveliest sights in South Africa. There were not so many suburban shops in those days. Housewives from Salt River to Sea Point found that Plein Street satisfied all their household needs. Moreover, there was the advantage that husbands were “free” on Saturday nights – free to carry the parcels. Farmers from as far away as Paarl and Malmesbury spent Saturday in town, went to football in the afternoon, shopped in Plein Street at night. The crowded, eager street knew no class distinctions. It was a great counter resounding to the tune of trade.

What a cry of agony arose when a few bold reformers suggested that it was unfair to spoil the shop-assistants' week-end by keeping them sweating until midnight every Saturday. Nevertheless, the reformers had their way in the Provincial Council, and September, 1926, saw the last of the Saturday night rush in Plein Street. A revolution had come about in the shopping life of Cape Town – almost in the social life of the city. Protests were heard long after the overworked shop-assistants had gained their decent week-end.

“People who could conceive of a thing like this – to shut up all the necessities of life on Saturday night – require their minds to be investigated

by a mental authority,” declared a pompous speaker in the City Council. Shopkeepers moaned for months over their “lost trade”. At the end of three months a Plein Street spokesman estimated the loss at £120,000 a year. He declared that farmers had abandoned their age-old shopping custom, saying: “Cape Town is dead on Saturday, let us stay in our own dorp.”

On the other hand a shoe-shop proprietor announced that he had been converted to the new hours. The whole status of Plein Street had been raised, he pointed out, and he was now able to sell the same high classes of goods as the Adderley Street shopkeepers.

One unexpected effect of the early closing was that twice as many people attended the Cape Town orchestra's popular concerts on Saturday nights. The mob had turned to music. “Today you can find abundant enterprise in Plein Street; but for a glimpse of Old Cape Town, as I have said, you have to stand at the top of the street and look round Stal Plein.

Stal Plein, originally Staal Plein, was the site of the Governor's stables, opposite Government House. Long before that it was called Looyers Plein, the square of the tanners.

Between Plein Street and Church Street runs Spin Street, scene of a vanished silk-spinning industry. The first attempt by Willem Adriaan van

der Stel failed when the eggs died. Then a French silk expert named Gilliaume was sent to the Cape with his family. In one year he produced eighty-four pounds of silk, and the Company gave him a barn for his work. This barn, known in later years as De Oude Spinnery, was burnt down in 1790.

Barrack Street, leading out of Plein Street, goes back to the period in the late eighteenth century when Cape Town was called “Little Paris” and French regiments were quartered there in a wing of the hospital.

Ritter, the first printer, had his shop in Plein Street in 1795 and turned out his quaint almanacs. Some years later the Rev. Barnabas Shaw held the first Wesleyan services in a Plein Street hay loft. In many different ways Plein Street has played its part in the shaping of South African history.

CHAPTER 8

BEHIND THE IRON BALCONIES

LONG Street is not Cape Town's longest street, any more than Bree Street is the broadest. But for contrasts and the elusive quality called “local colour” it would be hard to find a thoroughfare with more personality anywhere in South Africa.

On the surface, Long Street appears to have been imported almost bodily from those Glasgow iron-foundries which flourished in the late Victorian period. It is a street of cast-iron pillars and balconies, grim relics of a vanished era of crazy decoration. Behind this iron curtain, however, is another Long Street that takes you back to the days when it was called De Derde Berg Dwars-Straat – “the third street at right angles to the mountain”. The old Dutch fanlights, mouldings and kitchens are still there, but they are hidden by the shops.

My directory of 1865 shows how Long Street has changed its character. Martin Henson of the water police lived at No. 1, Long Street at that time, close to Jan Liehaan the fisherman and Hendrik Smeda the boatman. The street almost had its feet in the sea. It was a street of old-fashioned trades-blacksmiths, tallow chandlers, basket makers, Fakier the saddler and

harness maker, livery stables, coachmen. Mrs. Barlow, the bonnet-maker, had her workshops there, and the Misses Solomon and Amm conducted their forgotten seminary.

Take a walk down Long Street and you will see how radio and cycle shops, dry-cleaners and hairdressers have ousted the old craftsmen. You find continuity only in bars and bottle-stores and food shops. Bars especially cling to old names.

I should say that the pleasant odour of modern Long Street is dominated by rival fish-and-chips recipes. Butchers may be closed, but Cape Town's time-honoured fish dishes are proudly displayed. You cannot go far without halting before a magnificent plate of pickled fish or smoked snoek. Up the steep side-streets lies the Malay quarter, source of the cookery secrets that have survived the centuries. There, too, the origin of many of the old Cape sweets and pastries seen in these shop windows may be traced, the tammeletjies and bossuiker, kraakelen and sugared mebos.

After food and other refreshments, there must be more furniture shops in Long Street than any other sort of enterprise. The cabinet-makers who appear in my old directory would certainly be excited if they could see the prices marked on their chairs and kists in the antique shops today.

At the foot of Long Street is one enterprise which has lasted for more than a century. It was on October 6, 1845, that the corner-stone of Cape Town's gasworks was laid. Streets were garlanded, houses decorated with evergreen. On that great day in Long Street's history, freemasons poured oil and wine on the stone, and Baron von Ludwig, a director of the gas company, gave a banquet. "The onward impetus has suggested a better and more brilliant light for the Cape," he declared. "Lanterns and the farthing candle will soon be at a discount." Long Street retained its lanterns, however, for many years. There were some who held that lighted streets were harmful to morals because people were tempted to stay up late at night. "Gunfire to gunfire" was their motto, and they went to bed at nine.

At the upper end of Long Street until a few years ago stood Cape Town's oldest orphanage. Orphan Lane is still there, but the building designed by Thibault soon after 1800 made way in 1947 for a dairy. When the building was first opened with the aid of a wealthy widow, Mrs. Margeretha Moller, it was used as a home for decayed but respectable women. Then came the "Weeshuis"; but Cape Town had few orphans and part of the large house remained empty. Meanwhile the South African College had been founded and was looking round for classrooms. The orphanage directors solved the

problem by offering accommodation rent free for six years. So the college started its work in Long Street.

Though the orphanage has gone, you can still find a gracious landmark of Old Cape Town half-way down the street. Gaze upon the two ancient palms and the Malay house behind them. This double-storeyed house was built late in the eighteenth century. Two devout Moslems, Jan van Boekies, a Javanese ex-slave, and his wife, lived there but gave it up so that the community could have a meeting-place and provide a home for their priest. Jan van Boekies has been credited with planting the famous palms in 1790. They have now been proclaimed an historical monument. At the time of planting, and for many decades afterwards, a water furrow ran down the street. The trees flourished, and it is on record that they had reached a fair height during the First British Occupation of the Cape.

Towards the end of last century the Town Council bought a number of fore-courts in Long Street to widen the thoroughfare. The palms were included in the purchase, but fortunately they were spared. Long Street nearly lost one of the palms in 1947, however, for the bole caught fire, under the crown, and the fire brigade arrived only just in time. The old house is still the home of a Malay priest, and Moslems still join in prayer there every week. The

ground floor is below street level, showing that Long Street has risen several feet in the past 150 years.

Next door to the house with the palms, in the middle of last century, lived Wilhelm Langschmidt, the German painter. One of his pictures shows the Long Street of the period, with stoeps and flat-roofed houses. Under a tree sits the artist himself, wearing a top-hat.

More people live over the shops of Long Street than ever before, but as a residential address Long Street is no longer aristocratic. In Adriaan van der Stel's time a mansion called Vredenburg was built at the top of the street. It was the home of Lieutenant Jesse Slotsboo, a military surgeon whose varied duties included superintending the Company's builders, slaves and gravediggers. Vredenburg became a girls' school, and a block of flats now covers the site.

When my 1865 directory was published there were coolies and washerwomen living in Long Street, fruiterers and fishmongers, too. But the Hon. Petrus Roubaix occupied No. 64, next door to the widow Vermaak. It was a cosmopolitan street then, and still is – especially when you come to the cafes. Greek, Swiss, Portuguese, Italian and Austrian names are to be

found among the caterers, and a German baron was at work behind a cafe counter not long ago.

Long Street has a dozen hotels and half a dozen bottle stores. One at least, the Crown and Anchor, has been in the same place for about a century, though old customers would recognize only the name. Martienssen's brewery near the top of the street lasted a long time, but is now merely a memory of the happy days of "tickey beer".

Pawnbrokers once made Long Street their headquarters, but they are not so plentiful now. The patriarch of the profession in Cape Town is still there, however, so that if you have "a friend in trouble" you can still raise the money. No one ever goes to a pawnbroker to help himself.

You can spend a fortune in Long Street easily enough, but it is also a street favoured by many who have to buy their groceries in small parcels. I have a pamphlet, written in the early 'eighties of last century, in which the writer described a Long Street shopping incident. Many women were then under the impression that they secured better value by buying a halfpenny worth at a time. So a little girl entered a shop and rattled off this list: "Ma says I must fetch a halfpenny tea, a halfpenny coffee, butter, milk, sugar, cheese, candles, soap, cinnamon, pepper, salt, raisins, currants, matches, potatoes,

beans, rice, mustard, dried apples, sweets, wood, curry-powder, bread-and a halfpenny change:” With that she put down a shilling and watched the shopkeeper making up twenty odd parcels. I am told that this queer idea of economy persists among certain natives, though the tickey has become the unit of value.

Curio shops are to be found in Long Street, but they cannot compete with Mr. C. M. Villet, “florist and collector of natural curios”, who lived at No. 71, Long Street early last century. Villet kept a live elephant on the premises and charged one rixdollar admission. This enterprise proved so profitable that Villet soon added a lioness with four young cubs. For thirty years or more Villet's menagerie was one of the sights of Cape Town; but when ostriches and wild dogs joined the show he had to move his animals to Green Point.

Long Street still has a taxidermist, however, one of those rare craftsmen who has mounted everything from a crawfish to a polar bear. Old maids bring their departed parrots, canaries, dogs and cats. Farmers come in with the heads of champion bulls.

It is a street of strange juxtapositions; a mosque built on to a grocery store; balloon glasses for old brandy on the same shelf as a series of engineering

manuals. Nowadays the most picturesque section of Long Street is to be found above the Wale Street intersection, but it was not always so.

At the bottom of Long Street, there lingered until recent years a shop which must have been one of the oldest in the old town. Quaint enough for canvas, it was sketched by at least one artist, and I have a copy. When the place was built, the winter seas must almost have reached the stoep. Half-doors, with a fanlight above, led into a room which was once a sailors' tavern. There was an iron hand-rail besides the worn steps, and below the stoep, crouching under the house, was a tiny shop with a horseshoe over the door. Thus no space was wasted. A dealer in scrap metal inhabited the lower winkel. It was a brave survival in a modern city, and I wish those white walls still caught the sun. The whole scene belonged to the eighteenth century – or perhaps the seventeenth. I miss that old shop.

I have covered a few miles in this haphazard journey up and down Long Street, but if you walk straight from end to end, the distance is 4,200 feet. Longmarket Street, the longest street in the town is 6,930 feet in length.

Long Street has its lanes and cul-de-sacs; and some of the side streets have names that need explaining. No lions have roamed in Leeuwen Street since the street was built; it is just a way up to the Lion's Rump. Pepper Street is a

mystery to me. Did a spice merchant have his warehouse there? Overbeek Square, at the upper end of Long Street, was once the address of a Mr. Overbeek. Buitensingel Street, leading out of Overbeek Square, was called the “outside fringe” because the town once ended there.

It was not until 1700 that the fiscal and two members of the Court of justice were instructed to name all the streets of Cape Town. In that year De Derde Berg Dwars-Straat became Lange Straat. No one could then have imagined that the street would become grotesque with mass-produced cast-iron, fretwork effects, and festoons of plaster fruit that would have made Anton Anreith shudder.

CHAPTER 9

STREET OF THE MERCHANTS

“ONE of the most imposing sights ever witnessed at the Cape,” was the way a newspaper summed up the ceremony on St. George's Day, April 23, 1830, when St. George's Street received its present name. This ceremony was the laying of the cathedral foundation stone. Governor Sir Lowry Cole drove through streets lined with troops. It was a public holiday.

Exactly one year later St. George's Street was lighted up with oil lamps, the money having been raised by public subscription. This was the first regular effort in South Africa to illuminate any street at night.

The street, of course, had taken shape in the early days, and in 1691 it was named Berg Street. As more streets grew up, the name was lengthened to De Eerste Berg Dwars-Street – “the first street at right angles to the mountain.” Cape Town's three Berg Streets were often confused, and in 1791 the name of “Eerste Berg” was changed to Venus Street. Governor van der Graaff had a grudge against a clergyman who had preached on Jezebel; for somehow the Jezebel of the sermon seemed to resemble the governor's wife. So the governor had a signboard with a portrait of Venus nailed above the

offending minister's door in Venus Street. This act of spite was remedied after Van der Graaff's departure, and the name of Berg Street was restored.

Even in the 1840's, St. George's Street was described as “second to none as a business street”. Most of the leading tailors had their shops there. Baron von Ludwig, the former chief of police and botanist, kept a tobacco and snuff shop in St. George's Street at that period. His portly wife did all the work behind the counter; but every afternoon at four the baron called for her with his carriage drawn by four cream-coloured ponies and took her back to their fine home and garden called “Ludwigberg”, in Kloof Street.

At that time, too, there was a public outcry when a severed human leg was found in the street. It was suspected that body snatchers had been at work in the Somerset Road cemeteries for the benefit of surgeons in the hospitals.

One day in 1849 the *Cape Town Mail* contained a bilingual advertisement announcing the arrival of Augustus Urmston Meredith, “tailor and professed trouser cutter” from St. James's Street, London. It ended: “A.U.M. is not so bigoted but that he willingly yields to gentlemen's own peculiarities.” This was the father of George Meredith, the English novelist. Meredith senior opened his shop at the corner of St. George's and Church Streets and remained in business there for about fourteen years. Meanwhile his son was

in London, writing his novels. When George Meredith's, *Evan Harrington* reached Cape Town, the father was “pained beyond expression”. It was frankly autobiographical. There was little affection between father and son, and the revelations of the novel came as a blow to the tailor. Meredith of St. George's Street was a cultured man, fond of chess and long walks. It is fascinating to imagine the influence which George Meredith might have had on South African literature if only he had accompanied his father to the Cape.

A leopard escaped in St. George's Street in March, 1850. It was being exhibited by a visitor from the interior when it broke out of its cage. Finally the leopard took refuge in a house. A newspaper said: “It received a lot of heavy blows and was supposed to be dead, but much to the satisfaction of the owner it recovered.”

Cape Town's first pillar box appeared in St. George's Street in the middle of last century. It was an unofficial venture – a red-painted coal stove, adapted for the purpose, and mounted on the stoep of R. N. Ross, the ironmonger. The post office authorities copied the idea from this private enterprise. A new two-storeyed building in St. George's Street housed the General Post

Office in 1873. Before that, all the postal work had been done in a little den in Bureau Street.

Turning to my street directory published in 1865, I discover a solid St. George's Street of merchants, banks and other prosperous enterprises, not so different from the street of today. Number One was the private entrance to the Hamburg Hotel. Robert Unger, the pork butcher, and Samuel Solomon, the painter, had their shops at that end of the street. But very soon one comes to the Mosenthals, the Collisons, J. G. Steytler, the Van der Byls and other merchants. Professional men with rooms in St. George's Street were Dr. J. P. Landsberg the surgeon, Dr. Pieter Chiappini the physician, Jan Truter the attorney, George Brunette the notary, and Advocate Jacob H. Dreyer.

Pieter Marais kept the only boarding-house in the street, and at No. 13 was the Misses E. and R. Pappe's ladies' seminary. Alfred Pappe, assistant librarian, lodged with his sisters.

In those days the town council collected only £15,000 a year in rates. St. George's Street was valued at £80,000, compared with £120,000 for Adderley Street.

Throughout most of last century you could not walk far along any pavement without encountering steps leading up to high stoeps. I have a photograph of upper St. George's Street taken in 1878, and this reveals stoep after stoep, many of them shaded by oaks. It was all right for the stoep-owners, but people on foot had constantly to dodge out into the road. As far back as 1828 a commission of inquiry reported on the stoep problem. "Great inconvenience has arisen from a deference to the habits of the Dutch inhabitants and to their predilection for raised terraces called 'stoeps' in front of their houses," said the commissioners. "These stoeps have been allowed to interfere with the space otherwise devoted to foot passengers in the narrow streets, and to approach the gutters too nearly in the broader ones." The commissioners noted that the Burgher Senate had the power to remove projections, but that it was too late to do anything about such a widespread nuisance. All they could suggest was that no more projecting stoeps should be built.

Anti-stoep agitations arose from time to time, and in 1862 the demolition of stoeps began. It was a slow process, and as late in the century as 1887 the work was held up through lack of money. Thus the stoeps of St. George's Street and other main thoroughfares are still remembered by many old Capetonians.

CHAPTER 10

OLD SEAFARING QUARTER

OVER lower Bree Street hovered a seagull. I thought it must be the reincarnation of a sailorman looking for old haunts and old friends. For this was once Cape Town's seafaring quarter; and though it has lost the sea, there are still signs of the roaring waterfront that all the world's seamen knew. I used to buy rope and paint for my small yacht from a Bree Street ship chandler. Now even the unusual piece of marine statuary over the shop has vanished – fishing boats in vivid colours sailing across a stone ocean. Within, the atmosphere is no longer compounded of tar, fresh vegetables, canvas and brass polish.

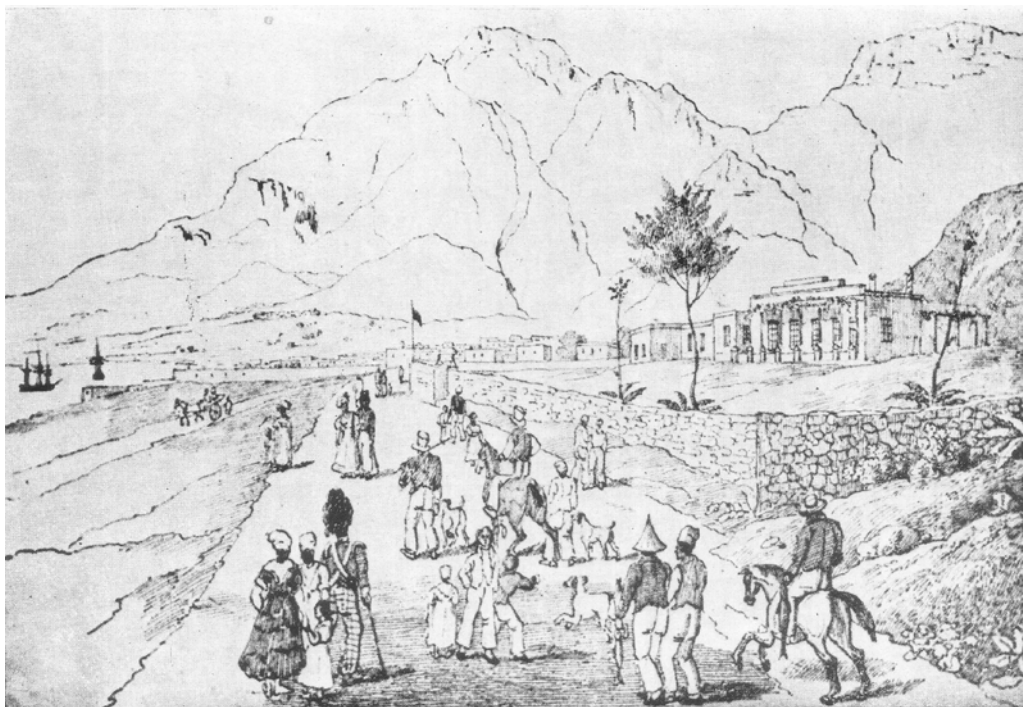
In the days before Table Bay receded, Bree Street was a queer mixture of solid respectability and riotous behaviour. Some way up the street were the elegant eighteenth-century town houses of wealthy burghers; flat-fronted, double-storeyed homes with heavy mouldings and lanterns in the fanlights. The Hertzog's lived in one of those fine Bree Street homes, with large, cool rooms and small-paned windows. It was Thibault's design, and Anreith moulded the pediment as a symbol of the owner's career. For the Johannes Hertzog of those days was a prosperous merchant. The pediment revealed a

Cherub Mercury (god of transport and commerce) reclining on boxes and casks with a tally-sheet in one hand and winged trident in the other.

Not many of those old houses are still used as residences. Where they survive, they have become warehouses defaced by business signs. One or two firms, however, have restored their houses and set a dignified example in restraint. They have proved how lovely the old architecture can become in the hands of appreciative owners.

A late eighteenth-century Bree Street house which lasted until the middle of 1950 was No. 71, where the “grey lady” walked. This was another of Thibault's designs. Part of it remained a dwelling house until the end, haunted even while the housebreakers were at work.

Cape Town was a more sociable place when most people lived in town. After the opening of the horse-drawn tramway to Green Point in 1863, and the Wynberg railway two years later, Bree Street began to lose its residents. Yet some still clung to their fine houses at the end of last century. The old Cape families who lived in Bree Street in 1865 are listed in my street directory of that year. Mr. J. A. Roos, the municipal secretary, was to be found next door to the Prince of Wales Inn. Mr. J. C. Watermeyer, the wholesale grocer and Mr. G. J. de Korte, the attorney, were neighbours. Farther up the wide street dwelt the Brinks



The Road into Cape Town from Green point.

and the Stemmetts, Jan Laubscher, the chemist Bosenberg, Petrus Keytel, J. C. Wicht and J. G. Gie (both landed proprietors), J. Barry Munnik and the Widow Langerman.

After that Bree Street became a shopping centre where Abrahamse the tailor, Jakoef the butcher, Saban Elligro the carpenter, Anna Koning the haberdasher, Sophia Wilson the seamstress and others plied their trades. Between these names one finds such folk as April the musician, Philip Middlekoop the printer and Coenraad Moos the fishmonger.

Down at the nautical end of Bree Street it was less sedate. The inns varied according to their keepers, but the tough places rivalled the dens of the Boca in Buenos Ayres. My old directory reveals no. 2, Bree Street as the Hope Inn, with Harp Inn next door. Within the toss of a ship's biscuit one could find a wine merchant, a sail-maker, the British Hotel conducted by the Widow Love, the Jolly Sailor's Inn, the British Queen Hotel, the Hibernia brewery depot, Schipper the tobacconist and the Black Bull Inn.

I can imagine the evenings there, and I have a first-hand description of Bree Street and the seafaring quarter from a sailorman whose memories go back to the 'eighties of last century. "It was dark and dangerous when the gas lit pubs closed and seamen fought with knives in the street," declared the old sailorman. "They

called it a tame year when there were only three or four murders. One small, evil square off Bree Street was known as Sebastopol because of the battles there; and at the end of this square was a lunatic asylum.”

Remittance men patronized the pubs, and my friend remembered one who appeared in Bree Street “booted and spurred once a quarter – when his money arrived”. Some of the pubs, like Billy Biddlecombe's Royal Navy Bar, were “dance and singsong places”. Saturday nights saw the wildest scenes, for the redcoats from the barracks joined in the fun and sold their uniforms and razors to buy more beer. Many an argument ended in a fist and belt fight between the Inniskilling Fusiliers and the sailors.

Stewards went to the Queen's at the Dock Gates, firemen preferred the Waterman's Arms, while seamen spread out into such favourite bars as “Mother Driscoe's”, Delponte's Roma, the Great Eastern and the so-called music-halls where the entertainment was free to all who bought a drink.

“If there was a seamen's mission in those days I never heard of it,” remarked my friend. “Near the Dock Gates, however, lived an elderly lady who invited seamen into her sitting-room to write letters home. She sold penny cakes and gave away tracts. After an evening in Bree Street it was nothing unusual to wake up in the fo'c's'le next morning and find a few

remittance men and beachcombers sleeping on the deck. They shared our breakfast, such as it was.”

Such were the Bree Street contrasts – Cape Town's merchant princes at one end, barmaids, jangling pianos, hornpipes and revelry at the other. Most celebrated of all the characters at the seafaring end of the street was the legendary Mrs. Sophia Nelson,⁵ better known as “Black” Sophie. For decades she ran a boarding-house for sailors, and her parties were lavish and memorable. Respectable citizens who were entertained there sometimes woke up on board outward-bound ships. “Black Sophie” knew how to find crews.

Table Bay had three jetties in the middle of last century, the oldest at the Castle, the Central jetty at the foot of the Heerengracht, and a new one at the end of Bree Street. Many a whale was cut up and put into the blubber pots at this spot; the industry flourished in Table Bay last century, and Bree Street was treated to more than a whiff of oil.

Tom Kehoe (pronounced Kew), a waterfront character, had his boatyard at the foot of Bree Street. Kehoe was an American with a goatee beard and a

⁵ See Lawrence Green's *At Daybreak for the Isles* for a full description of this establishment.

great reputation for daring seamanship. When ships in the bay signalled for help in heavy weather, Tom Kehoe would go out in his lighter Polly and sell them anchors at a price. Thus his yard, full of anchors of all sizes, became known as “Tom Kehoe's anchor ground.”. Kehoe also had a whaleboat. Once he harpooned a thirty-three foot shark – possibly a record for Table Bay. In his old age Kehoe and his wife kept the Nova Scotia Hotel, a famous waterfront pub, known to clients as “Mother Kehoe's”. Mrs. Kehoe was indeed a motherly person, and gave free board and lodging to seamen who had missed their ships. Cornish miners bound for the Namaqualand copper mines always stayed there.

Many strange coins were gladly accepted from seamen in the Bree Street bars. My 1865 directory gives the rates of exchange – Russian silver roubles 2s. 8d., Portuguese and Spanish gold doubloons £3 17s. 6d. an ounce, pistoreens 8d., gold mohurs £1 7s., Danish ducats 6s. 6d.

A pioneer iron and brass foundryman named Prestwich was at work in Bree Street in the middle of last century, and he set up a steam flour mill there. That accounts for Prestwich Street, off Bree Street.

Cape Town's seafaring quarter began encroaching on the bay centuries ago. Van Riebeeck really started the reclamation scheme when he placed some of

his early buildings at the very edge of Table Bay. Waterkant Street, Riebeeck Street, Sea Street, Jetty Street all grew up at different times as the beaches were pressed further back. They are all so far inland today that a newcomer might be puzzled by the maritime names.

In the old town the houses usually had lanes between them four feet in width to allow for the overhang of thatch and the run-off of rainwater. Such a lane was called a “steeg” and the “steeg” names were often picturesque. Off Waterkant (old residents never spoke of Waterkant Street) one found Dopper Steeg, Crabbe Steeg, Mossel Steeg, Klipfish Lane and Lelie Steeg.

Waterkant was the site of the post office and boat-house in 1865, and the Customs searchers had their headquarters there. In the same street were the Widow Berg's coffee rooms, John Jearey's Ship Tavern, the Blue Anchor, the Scotch Arms, the Sailors' Home Inn, the Edinburgh Castle Inn, Hoffmeister's brewery, Kelly's Railway Inn, a distillery, and various wine stores. No wonder they called Cape Town the “Tavern of the Seas”. Steintje the needlewoman lived on Waterkant, surrounded by alcoholic aromas.

At the same period Riebeeck Street had a more varied population. There were the inevitable inns, of course, the Prince Royal, the Sebastopol, the Mariner's Inn and Jacobse's canteen. But the residents included Henry

Fiford the sailmaker, van Dyk the fisherman and Sallie the fish salter, Bastra Talamoen the mason, Adiet the netmaker, Dollie Capries the cook, J. J. Zeeman mariner, Domingo Abdol the tailor and Jacobus Greve, shoemaker. Sea Street was filled with fishermen and boatmen, with only one landsman – Kassiem the basket-maker.

Buitenkant, as recently as seventy years ago, started on the mountainside in a bushy area where outcasts and thieves had their lairs. Down the street ran the Capel Sluit, an open water course in which children were swept away during the winter rains. In the Capel Sluit was found the body of a son of one of the Governors of the Cape Colony. It appeared that he had been murdered in a house in Buitenkant and thrown into the sluit; but the mystery was never solved. Buitenkant was the home of a few seafarers at the time of my directory, though cab-proprietors, horse-dealers, coachmen and wheelwrights were more plentiful. All quenched their thirsts at the Britannia Inn, the Royal Oak or Michael Hogan's inn.

Past the old houses tripped the Malay fish-hawker in conical straw hat, carrying his wares in two low, round baskets swinging one at each end of a bamboo yoke. “Hotnot, hotnot, hotnot!” came the high-pitched call of the hawker. When the housewives came to their doors they found not only

hottentot fish but snoek and silver fish, nice young crawfish and penguin eggs.

Gone, too, are the crossing-sweepers who made a living in wet months when the unpaved thoroughfares were seas of liquid mud. They accepted Cape Town's penny tips gratefully. That seagull I saw in Bree Street must have searched in vain for familiar scenes. Only a rare blast of a fish-horn is heard as an echo of a vanished seafaring quarter as vivid in its day as any waterfront scene in the world.

CHAPTER 11

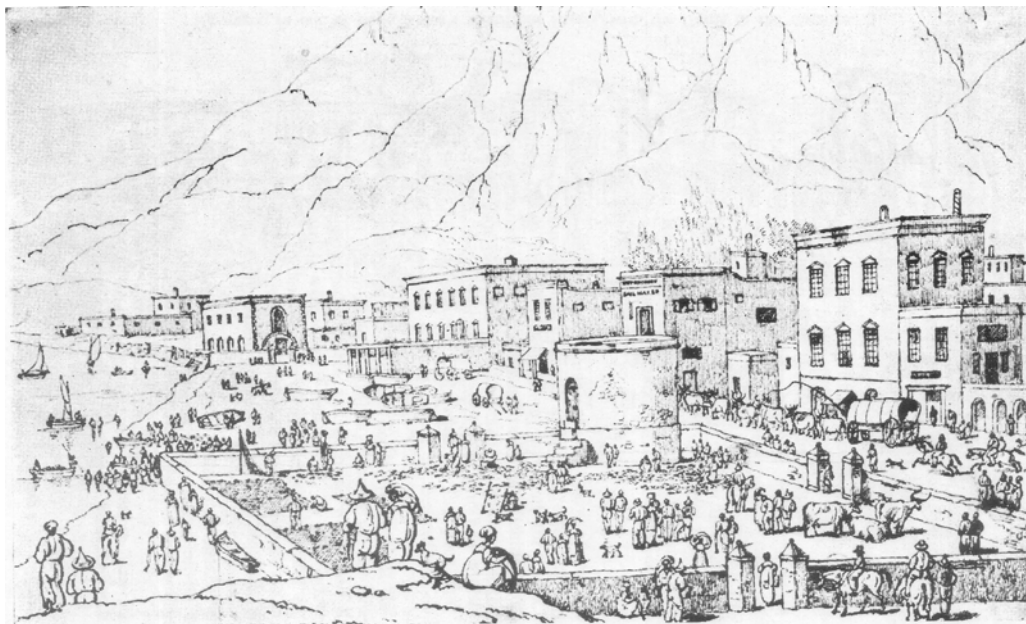
ROGGE BAY MEMORIES

*Sweet spot so romantic, which gladdens my view
As I Pass from the Tronk to that wharf called the New,
I love thee – and e'er on a hot summer's day;
On thy shores would I wander, my sweet Rogge Bay!*

“Sam Sly,” 1843.

CAPE TOWN lost the liveliest corner of its waterfront when the last fishing boat departed from Rogge Bay and the famous beach vanished beneath the reclamation scheme. Rogge Bay was as old as the Cape settlement. There the first locally-built sloop, the *Bruydegom*, was launched in 1663. She carried slate from Robben Island for the high stoeps, penguin eggs from Dassen, seals and fish from Saldanha.

Fish and fishermen made up the traditional Rogge Bay scene, though Cape Town's first market was held there. This was the “Passer”, where Van Riebeeck permitted the freemen to bring venison, pork, vegetables and dairy produce for sale. There the settlers grumbled at the price of eland or hartebeest and paid three stivers a pound for mutton when they could get it. A dressed penguin could be had for a stiver, however, and fowls were the same price. Rogge Bay in those days came



Cape Town's fish market in 1832, with the boats landing their catches.

deeply into the present city. Exchange Place was right on the sandy beach, and Waterkant Street was indeed washed by the waves.

Rogge Bay appears in very early documents as 't Rocken Baaye and also as Roche Bay. Rocks were to be seen before the bay silted up. The French called it “Baye de Poissons”. It is fairly clear that skate (rog in Nederlands) were caught there – hence Rogge Bay. The name should not be allowed to disappear like the beach. I hope to see a Rogge Bay Street somewhere on the site when the Table Bay foreshore is covered with buildings.

Canteens, fish stores and the crouching hovels of the fishermen stood centuries ago where tall buildings stand today. Later on came the first fish market, at the corner of the Heerengracht and the present Dock Road. Rogge Bay began to recede more than two hundred years ago as a result of a great gale which drove sand into the little harbour. The bay also received much rubbish from the Heerengracht; but the fishermen simply moved their boats forward and made the best of it. Boats still landed passengers there from ships. Some way above high water mark were the Dutch East India Company's granaries, and a few cannon dominated the landing place.

Fishermen were fond of looting wrecks when they had the chance, so that after such events they were confined to Rogge Bay. The fishing was poor in

the bay itself, and they were loud in their protests. In Sir David Baird's time it was possible to make a handsome profit by smuggling Spanish dollars to ships in Table Bay. So all the Rogge Bay boats were numbered and chained to the wooden jetty at night.

W. L. Sammons ("Sam Sly") was being sarcastic when he wrote his Rogge Bay ode shortly after arrival in 1843. Here is another verse in which he revealed the true state of affairs there:

*Here a plump deceased fowl,
there a racy snoek's head
Here some turnips are seen,
there some fragments of bread;
What luxuries rare (for which nothing's to pay)
Deck thy shores in Profusion, my own Rogge Bay.*

Fortunately the town beyond Rogge Bay impressed him more favourably. "This is a fairy scene, with white and yellow houses packed closely like gold and silver fish glittering in the sun," he wrote. "It reminds me of a Turkish city."

Cape Town's earliest ice supplies were distributed from Rogge Bay. The first cargo of natural ice arrived from the United States by the sailing ship

Kate Hastings in December, 1848, and was sold at threepence a pound. “This is the first investment of cool comfort received at the Cape,” remarked the *South African Commercial Advertiser*. “A few melting days will doubtless procure a warm demand.” Mr. William Avery organized a regular ice service in 1864 and put up an ice house at Rogge Bay where city customers were served. Wagons carried blocks of ice to Sea Point. Ice was railed as far as Wynberg, each consumer supplying two blankets and a strap. American ice chests were on sale at the depot. The price was reduced to two pence a pound, and kind-hearted Mr. Avery gave ice free to the sick poor on production of a medical certificate. He pointed out, however, that ice could only be brought through the tropics in large masses, and that he had been suffering heavy losses owing to the lack of sufficient regular customers. “My own firm conviction is that citizens should form the habit of drinking a glass of ice water first thing in the morning and taking an ice-cold bath before breakfast,” announced the spartan Mr. Avery. “It will then be found that your liver complaints, your rheumatisms and your heart disease – all fearfully prevalent in this otherwise salubrious climate – will be materially decreased.”

Almost within living memory the fishermen's cottages still clustered round Rogge Bay, fish were cured on the stoeps, nets were spread out to dry

between the Central Wharf and the Fish Jetty. Municipal water carts gathered there to load sea water from large tanks. Close by was the shipping master's office, where sailormen waited to sign on for their voyages.

Rogge Bay had two churches last century, St. John's and a small Dutch Reformed Church for fishermen. The cottages were demolished round about 1875, and the churches went later.

Rogge Bay lingered on through the first two decades of this century. I remember it as a beach covered with the familiar open boats, all with their bows turned seawards, all left ready for launching at a moment's notice. A beach of oars, tackle boxes and snoek kerries, anchor ropes and stone anchors. It was a memorable sight when the whole fleet put to sea under spritsails and jibs, and the scene on their return was even more vivid. For then all the old Malay priests and grey-bearded hadjis in Cape Town, all the bright-skirted Malay womenfolk and fezzed small boys seemed to be waiting on the sand. Then the fish carts were piled high and the fish-horns sounded triumphantly. Boats were washed and scrubbed, canvas covers lashed over spars and sails. Yet when the tired fisherman had departed Rogge Bay remained alive and raucous – alive with eager, greedy black-backed gulls screaming over the offal.

It was just that scene, I am sure, which moved W. L. Sammons to write the last verse of his Rogge Bay ode:

*Tell me not, tell me not, of the rapturous fare,
Of the boiled fish and rice found in Greenmarket Square,
Oh! where shall we see such a goodly array
Of dainties as strew thy sweet shores, Rogge Bay,
But when dimmed is this eye, and this brain turned to grey,
Still this nose will remember thy shores Rogge Bay.*

ONE OF the items which caught my eye recently in an Africana dealer's list was a second edition of Pappe's Synopsis of the *Edible Fishes at the Cape of Good Hope*. The little pamphlet was priced at four guineas. Botanists and marine biologists remember the name of Pappe, but otherwise he is a forgotten scientist of old Cape Town.

Dr. Ludwig Pappe, a medical man and botanist, really had no business in the fish world. He was appointed Colonial Botanist in 1858, and he occupied the chair of botany (and a seat on the Council) at the old South African College. He was also one of the three original trustees of the South African Museum. It is on record that his students were noted for their disorderly

behaviour, as Dr. Pappe was often away collecting specimens when he should have been lecturing.

He was one of the first to protest in public against “wanton” grass fires; and he pointed out that water supplies as well as South Africa's timber resources were affected by these fires.

While studying Cape seaweeds he was diverted by the fish. Scientific visitors such as Sparrman, Thunberg, Barrow and Burchell had paid little or no attention, he remarked, to the “cold denizens of the deep”. Pappe decided to compile a list of edible fish, based on personal observation, the accounts of fishermen and above all, nature herself. “I am fully aware that I venture on a path hardly trodden before in this Colony,” he wrote.

A party of French scientists had called at the Cape some years before in the corvette *l'Uranie*, but all their specimens had gone to the Museum of Natural History in France. Such famous collectors as Delalande and Verreaux had come later and sent more Cape fish to France. At first all that Pappe had to work on were the fish Dr. Andrew Smith had placed in the museum in Cape Town.

Pappe drew attention in his pamphlet to the deadly blaasop and described several fatalities. He reported that Cape fishermen regarded the paardevis

(sea-horse) as poisonous, but declared there was no foundation for this belief. With an eye to business, Pappe recommended that experiments should be carried out with the air bladders of fish to see whether they would yield isinglass. He had discovered a Cape Town wine merchant using the dried bladders of Cape kabeljou successfully to brighten his wine.

Pappe's description of the crawfish is amusing. "To the poorer classes of the community and to misers the crawfish is a regular God-send," he wrote. "It is dried occasionally for preservation." He also found a small local shrimp which made good eating. (It is so scarce nowadays that many an old Capetonian has never tasted it.) White mussels, he noted, were innocuous at some seasons, venomous at others. He had seen the effects in his medical practice.

There have been some striking changes in Cape Town's fish supplies since Pappe compiled his pioneer pamphlet. Then, as now, kabeljou was a staple fish, but Pappe also noted the geelbek (Cape salmon) as a fish "common along the whole coast, where it is caught abundantly with the hook or net". He said that it formed an article of food "for the poor and lazy" and was also prepared for export. Geelbek is a prized delicacy today.

Fashions in fish have changed since Pappe's day, too. He describes Hottentot as "a superior table fish". Some will agree, though he should have added that it must be fresh. Roman, he thought, was "one of the prettiest and most delicious fishes on our markets, plentiful near Roman Rock". Stompneus was excellent for pickling. Pappe explained that the bamboo fish was known to the fishermen as the "stink fish" because it fed on seaweed and smelt unpleasant when disembowelled. Nevertheless, it was a rich fish, scarce on the Cape Town market. Galjoen, he went on, was highly esteemed and fetched a good price. Some disliked it because of the black veins traversing the flesh. Always the doctor, Pappe added that at times it became too rich and required "good digestive organs".

Pappe naturally commented on the "strong and ferocious snoek, dispatched by blows on the head with a kind of knob-kierrie". He found the leervis "dry and insipid". The bagger or barbel, on the other hand, tasted to Pappe like eel and deserved consideration in spite of its ugly appearance.

The stockfish, according to Pappe, was a denizen of European seas, unknown at the Cape before the earthquake of 1809. He said that it was so rare at first that it fetched the exorbitant price of 4s. 6d. apiece. Since then sandbanks had been formed by the earthquake near the Table Bay entrance,

and stockfish had increased in numbers until it had become a standard fish. I doubt very much whether modern authorities would support Pappe's theory. The stockfish must have been there all the time. It is, of course, similar to the European hake. English writers, said Pappe, called the stockfish a "coarse fish, scarcely fit for the dinner table". However, it was fully appreciated at the Cape, and was cured and dried for export even in Pappe's day.

Like modern fish experts, Pappe favoured the unpopular skate as a sound table fish. He noted that the fishermen expected heavy weather when they found skate in their nets.

Dr. Pappe confessed that he was "imperfectly acquainted" with freshwater fishes, and omitted them, though he had heard that some were excellent. He dealt with forty-five species of sea fishes in his pamphlet of thirty-four pages. The first edition appeared in 1861, price one shilling. Pappe died the following year, and when the second edition was printed by W. Brittain of Cape Town in 1866, there were no changes or additions.

Other pamphlets by Pappe which are now rare and valuable are his *Medicinal Plants used by the Colonists*, *South African Ferns* and *South African Forest Trees*. Two fish bear the name of this medical man and botanist who

ventured into the fish market. One is the parrot fish, which some people fear to eat because of the beak; the other is an albacore.

Pappe's historic little pamphlet forms an odd contrast with the latest, classic work on the subject, Professor J. L. B. Smith's *Sea Fishes of Southern Africa*, which has 550 large pages and hundreds of illustrations. This mammoth book, however, costs much less than Pappe's thirty-four pages. Such is scarcity value and the enthusiasm of collectors.

WHEN YOU investigate the origins of Cape fish names it is surprising to find that the early settlers did not adopt a single Hottentot or Strandloper name for any species. There is the Hottentot fish, it is true, but as Peter Kolbe the astronomer explained, this was the fish sold by the Hottentots to the settlers. Later writers have suggested that the dingy colour of the fish after landing may have been responsible for the name.

Similarly it is remarkable that those skilful fishermen the Malays only bestowed one fish name of clear Malay origin. That is the panga, which resembles the “ikan pangirang” (prince) or silver fish of the East Indies. It is possible, however, that such mysterious names as bafaro, sancord, halfcord

and kartonkel are really Malay names. There is also the josup, which may be Malay, or a corruption of the Dutch “Jood's visch”.

Indeed, there are riddles of fish nomenclature which will never be solved, for the names were given as a result of trivial local incidents long ago. Fortunately for posterity, it is on record that the fish called “Portuguese salmon” started out in life as “Prodigal son”. I should never have guessed it.

Seventy-four and galjoen are controversial. Some say that the first seventy-four was caught from a seventy-four-gun man-o'-war at Simon's Bay. Others think that the blue lines on the sides of this fish resemble tiers of guns. In the same way the galjoen may suggest a Spanish galleon. There is a theory that the galjoen followed the galleons, but the shape is a more decisive clue. A galjoen looks like a three-decker.

There is no doubt at all about the jakopewer. Thanks to the old writer Francesci, we know that a pock-marked skipper, Jakob Evertson, had a rubicund face with protruding eyes and with the black stumps of his beard showing between the scars. His crew saw the likeness between man and fish and Kolbe declared that everyone was “ravished with mirth in the allusion”. Other fish named on the same ribald principles were the biskop and fransmadam, the latter an ugly customer with large black eyes.

Similarities to animals were responsible for the zebra, dassie and parrot fish. The seevark is more subtle; it is unlike a pig, but it does bristle like a porcupine. Then there is the needle fish with its long beak; the melkvis which turns a milky colour when cooked; the vioolvis, a violin-shaped shark; and the pampelmoes, which is not unlike the citrus fruit called shaddock.

Most romantic of all Cape fish names is the dageraad, a palatable red fish which, when landed, displays waves of colour like a gorgeous dawn. The silverfish is not silver but red, and in earlier times was known as the goldfish. John Brown, Jacob Swart, bluefish, and geeloogie are other “colour” names. The geelbek has yellow gills, and the yellow-tail is equally obvious.

Some think the roman takes its name from Roman Rock in False Bay, but it is more likely to be the other way round. Roman, where the fish is concerned, is probably a corruption of rooiman. The dikkop and stompneus, of course, owe their names to their shapes, while the baardman has a feeler under the jaw. Then there are the fish known by the sounds they make out of water – the chor-chor, the squid called tschokka and the plain grunter.

Three fish were named during the first year of the Cape settlement – steenbras, harders and snoek. Van Riebeeck said that the 750 “beautiful steenbraesems” caught at the Salt River mouth just after his arrival were similar to the “Braesems” of Holland. In fact, they are entirely different. He also mentioned a catch of two thousand harders, which were salted; and he remarked plaintively: “Would that fresh meat were so abundant.” The harders were rightly named, for they resemble the Dutch harder and English grey mullet. In naming the snoek “zee snoek” the pioneers obviously realized that they had found something different from the Dutch freshwater pike.

Small snoek, up to twenty-four inches, are often referred to as China snoek. Fishermen declare that China snoek are caught after the ordinary snoeking season is over; they have thicker bodies and shorter heads than the large snoek. The scientists refuse to recognize the China snoek as a different species. It is illegal to capture snoek under twenty-four inches in length. Some time ago the Hermanus fishermen landed thousands of “China snoek”, and were brought before the magistrate. They pleaded that China snoek were snoek which never grew any larger, and they were acquitted. No one knows why they are called China snoek, and their habits are as mysterious as the name.

Soles (tongen) were an early discovery at Saldanha. The fishermen also reported plaice and flounders which, sad to relate, are not found now.

Kabeljou is a very old name, and early navigators considered it unlucky to pass over the Agulhas Bank without dropping their lines for Cape cod. The name is probably derived from the French cabelliau, actually a fish of another species. You also hear of “boer kabeljou”, a huge variety beloved by countryfolk with large families to feed.

Most of the Dutch names belong to west coast fish, while English names were bestowed by the British settlers to the east. There is an Englishman fish in Natal waters, a regular John Bull of a fish with a ruddy complexion. In St. Helena Bay there is a barneta fish, probably altered by local usage after it had been named by some sailor who knew the bonito.

An appealing name is that of the mooinoointjie, a modest bamboo fish with golden stripes. Oddest of all, perhaps, is the windtoy, a rare, edible snapper with rosy fins and a delicate silver colour. It usually appears before or after heavy gales – a plaything of the winds. Only the most vivid names survive among fish, and our Cape fish lack nothing in descriptive genius. The pylstert (stingray) has indeed a tail like a poisoned arrow, while the skin of the leervis is certainly as tough as leather.

Bokkoms, of course, are sun-dried fish. The name is an old one, and it probably came from Holland, where the smoked, salted herring is called a “bokking” to this day. Many varieties of bokkoms are made at the Cape, but when harders are used the product is always known as harder bokkoms. Marsbankers also make tasty bokkoms. The fish are not gutted, but are first pickled in brine strong enough to float a potato. After thirty-six hours the air in the stomach is squeezed out, the fish are threaded through the eyes and hung in large bunches for a fortnight or more on a wooden framework or *stellasie*.

Farm servants love them, and fortunes have been founded on the sale of bokkoms in the platteland. They must be cooked on a gridiron, and they are easily spoilt by inexperienced hands. A special dish is made by pounding the heads and preparing a gravy from meat liver. Smoked bokkoms are prepared according to secret recipes. Rarest of all bokkoms are those made from the leervis, which has few bones.

Afrikaans has lent itself admirably to the happy spontaneity of the Cape fish names. Latin may be more appropriate for scientific purposes, but I am not going to call a fish *Tachysurus feliceps* when it is nothing more than a barbel or bagger.

CHAPTER 12

WORLD OF HENDRIK BOOM

As you saunter from the Avenue oaks into the tranquil greenery of the Cape Town botanic gardens, the far-off world of Hendrik Boom opens like the covers of a book. Boom was Van Riebeeck's garden superintendent, a keyman in the enterprise which was to transform cracked earth into vegetables for the Company's settlement and ships. Three centuries after Boom, another cultivator from the Netherlands is in charge of these well-tilled acres.

He is Mr. Arthur William van den Houten, Director of Parks and Gardens, a highly-skilled horticulturist with a deep regard for those old fellow-countrymen who struggled with the same south easters and winter floods and planted their seeds hopefully in the same earth.

“Van Riebeeck could not have chosen a better site,” Mr. van den Houten told me. “I still find his dagboek and garden almanac of value. If the governors and gardeners who followed had kept their records with the same accuracy, it would not be necessary to carry out so many experiments today.”

A tall man nearing sixty is Mr. van den Houten, with a great deal of the artist about him. Born in Rotterdam, he qualified at the celebrated gardens school there; but while studying horticulture by day he attended the academy of, art at night. Then he went to England. He held appointments at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, and at the Regent Park Garden in London for more than three years. "I came to the Cape to see a little more of the world, and liked it so well that I have remained for thirty years," explained Mr. van den Houten.

During the early years he was in charge of municipal forests on Table Mountain. He planted silver leaf trees and proteas and tried to abolish the pines. "To me, a tree is a magnificent piece of statuary," he says. "The saddest part of my duties came when I had to deal with forest fires and walk through blackened plantations." Nowadays there is a city forest officer; but Mr. van den Houten has not finished with trees. His department has 25,000 roadside trees to care for, and thousands to plant every year – a new forest scattered throughout the Cape Peninsula. Mr. van den Houten often admires the strength of some of the trees in the Cape Town botanic gardens. In summer and winter they are hammered by the winds. "We have had our losses," he says, "but many a slender tree stands proudly after taking many beatings." He points to the large pear tree, a Dutch saffraan, as the oldest

inhabitant of the Cape Town gardens. Somewhere about the time of Governor Ryk Tulbagh the original tree must have been blown down; but four shoots came up, and these must be at least two centuries old.

A camphor tree is another venerable landmark, probably a century and a half of age. And there are many trees which have passed the century mark. This is the city's last forest. It is remarkable that it should have survived within a few paces of Adderley Street.

Relics of the original vegetable garden still come to the surface – small yellow bricks, tiles from Holland and China. Wells have been found in recent years, the wells from which slaves watered the gardens with buckets. The sundial, dated 1781, is the oldest piece of masonry which can be identified. The belltower, replica of the slave bell structure at Elsenburg, is much more recent. It is used as a warning at closing-time. An Australian soldier tolled the bell so vigorously during the First World War that he almost sounded his own funeral dirge, for the bell came down and broke his leg.

Every botanic garden has a flavour of its own. The expert in the Cape Town gardens forms a strong impression of variety; trees from many climates growing close together; Norfolk Island pine, deodar from the Himalayas,

birch and maple, elm and bluegum, trees from Arabia and England and the Mediterranean. Mr. van den Houten glances with special pride at an English horse-chestnut which he brought with him in a cocoa tin when he left England for Cape Town. It is a model of what a tree should be after thirty years.

The rose garden is another tribute to Mr. van den Houten's work. His "three year plan" for roses is famous, and as he admits himself, "worth a guinea to anyone who grows them". Each year he presents new varieties to the wondering public.

"Growing is a psychic gift," says Mr. van den Houten. "Some people are in tune with the infinite, and they get the results. Of course the horticulturist is still very much a pioneer. All he can do is to introduce trees, shrubs and plants which he thinks will do well. Others benefit from his mistakes."

Mr. van den Houten has what he calls "spare time side-lines," and among them are goldfish. Between the wars the Japanese presented goldfish to the Cape Town botanic gardens. They were squat, ungainly goldfish and they sulked on the bottom of the fishponds. When they did rise lazily to the surface they were often seized by birds. After many years of selection and crossing with ordinary bowl fish, Mr. van den Houten succeeded in

breeding a streamlined goldfish, lovely to watch and too swift, for predatory birds. He is fascinated by everything alive – especially the human beings who pass through the gardens.

About ten to fifteen thousand people enter the gates daily. People going to and from work. The lunchers under the trees. And finally the visitors from up-country and overseas who show the keenest interest in the kaleidoscope of new blooms and foliage. “Perfection in flowers is easier than in human beings,” declares Mr. van den Houten. “Nevertheless, my experience is that you seldom meet a rascal among gardeners. Living close to Nature brings out the best in man.”

ONLY HIGH officials and ships' officers were allowed to enter the garden in Van Riebeeck's day. Trespassers received a hundred lashes and worked without payment for the Company for twelve months. It was a hard task, establishing this garden, for at first Van Riebeeck had few men to spare. He thought of importing Chinese, famous as gardeners, but had to be content with West African slaves. Nevertheless, the peas and carrots sown just after arrival were plucked in September, and other vegetables were “growing famously”.

The first winter came, and the floods washed out the garden and threatened the mud fort. Cabbages came up far from where they had been planted. Herbs and quinces, which had lined the newly-built canals, were carried out to sea. A ship bringing seed from the East Indies was driven off her course, and St Helena received the seed which Van Riebeeck sorely needed. Yet in spite of all set-backs, the garden produced turnips, beetroots and corn within the first year. He planted St. Helena apple-trees, tobacco, watermelons and sweet potatoes; and noted that mealies did well. Among his early flowers were carnations. Later on he was able to send tubs of carnations and rosemary bushes to the Company's garden in Batavia.

Nevertheless, it was no ornamental garden in Van Riebeeck's time and for long afterwards. An entry in Van Riebeeck's diary for October 13, 1652, reveals an early triumph of kitchen gardening: "Farewell dinner to the officers of the yacht *Goede Hoop*. Everything on the table reared at the Cape-fowls, peas, spinach, chervil, asparagus (a finger's thickness) and cabbage, lettuce as hard as cabbages and weighing each if pounds. Greens all growing nicely. Turnips grow well on the sandy soil. Expect good success with the gardens; barley and wheat very fine."

Father Tachard, the Jesuit priest, in 1685, was “mightily surprised to find one of the loveliest and most curious gardens in a country that looks to be one of the most dismal and barren places in the world. The beauty of it consists not, as in France, in compartments, beds of flowers nor waterworks. Here you have walks planted with Lemon-trees, Pomegranate-trees and Orange-trees, which are covered from the wind by high and thick hedges of a kind of Laurel which they call Speck, always green and pretty. Besides the excellent fruits of Europe you have also Ananas, Banana-trees and others that bear the rarest fruits of the world.”

Simon van der Stel, with the last two decades of the seventeenth century at his disposal, transformed the Company's Garden. He laid out the parallelograms and experimented with many foreign trees and shrubs. Hendrik Oldenland, his master gardener, carried out the improvements faithfully. Oldenland was also a botanist, and had studied medicine at Leyden for several years. He dried a large number of plants and wrote a descriptive catalogue in Latin, found long after his death.

The Dutch Reformed minister Valentyn recorded favourable impressions during this period. “One of the most beautiful things here in Table Bay is the incomparable garden of the East India Company,” he wrote. “All that

the ancients wrote about the garden of the Hesperides, with its pure golden apples, can hardly approach in the slightest degree the matchless gardens of the Cape.”

At the same period, however, came Francois Leguat. He saw the garden during a parched, windy February, and he was inclined to be more critical. “’Tis true you see there the most charming walks of orange and citron trees,” Leguat admitted. “It has likewise in great abundance almost all our sorts of herbs, pulse, flowers and other plants. All about this garden there are a great many thick trees which, though they defend it tolerably from the wind, yet they cannot absolutely do it, which is the reason that things there do not thrive absolutely well. The trees themselves do not grow so kindly as in other places.”

Early in the eighteenth century Captain Beckman noted the “physick plants” and the lodge for the three hundred slaves who worked in the “neat and clean” garden. In the middle of that century came Auge, who remained in charge for twenty-five years, made long collecting trips, and raised the garden from a cabbage-growing enterprise to botanical status.

Captain Cook was there shortly after Auge's time and praised the garden as the “most ravishing spot”. With a true sailor's appreciation for the blessings

of the land, he mentioned the peaches, pomegranates, pineapples, bananas, citrons, lemons, oranges, the pears and apples of Europe and the crimson apples of Japan. Nevertheless, a decline had set in, and it is clear that during the last years of the Dutch East India Company the kitchen gardens at Rondebosch and Newlands were better kept than the garden in town. It was in ruins when Sir George Yonge arrived as Governor during the First British Occupation. Yonge restored the garden, paying for some of the work out of his own pocket. This gesture was forgotten, however, when he built high walls and closed the garden completely to the public. “Had the Governor torn the Magna Carta of the Cape into a thousand tatters he could not have put the Dutch into such an alarm,” wrote Lady Anne Barnard. “For 150 years they had enjoyed the privilege of walking under the shade of these oaks – ‘tis the only public walk of the Cape – and all ranks of people, the women particularly, were furious.”

As a sop to the anger he had aroused, Yonge allowed the people to use the main walk on condition that they inscribed their names in a book at the guard-house. Most of the citizens refused to take advantage of this favour. The agitation went on, and finally Yonge was recalled.

Ever since that time the main garden has been open to all – at any rate on certain days of the week. About the middle of last century, however, a small part was set aside for botanical experiments and managed by a board. Subscribers paid £1 a year; they were allowed into the enclosure every day except Sunday, and were given plants to the value of their subscriptions. This was really the start of the modern botanical garden.

In the 1870s the gardens were still being maintained by private subscriptions. Every Wednesday afternoon the band in scarlet tunics marched from the barracks, followed by larrikins, and played on a mound in the gardens for more than two hours. There, too, the great H. M. Stanley and his Arab contingent assembled under the Norfolk pine to be photographed, Stanley in his white linen suit and sun helmet. Curator at that period was James McGibbon, tall and austere, who prodded small boys with his stick when he caught them stealing flowers. McGibbon distributed some of the beauty of the garden among every village in the Cape, enriching them with trees and shrubs, flowering plants, fruits, grape vines, grasses and clover. It was not until 1892 that the Colonial Government handed over the gardens to the Cape Town Municipality.

When Van Riebeeck left the Cape in 1662 the size of the garden was twenty-one morgen. Old governors robbed it of trees for their own furniture; but what was more serious, they allowed one encroachment after another, so that the present area is only fourteen acres. Flowers are still stolen occasionally; but the penalty is not so heavy as it was in 1753, when anyone who damaged the plants, smoked or drank in the sacred precincts was liable to be shot dead by the gardeners.

SOME OF the oaks planted in the Avenue in Simon van der Stel's time have survived to this day. There would be more of them but for the south-easter. It must be admitted that in sheltered Stellenbosch the oaks are finer. Many of the venerable Avenue oaks are not as old as they look. Before the oaks were planted there was an avenue of orange trees; and though the oaks are dear to Cape Town citizens, one may feel that if the oranges had been allowed to remain, they would have gained equal fame and provided as much beauty – and fruit, too.

Most of van der Stel's oaks came from England. Oldest of all was a large one almost opposite the Government House gates; and in 1924 the hollow trunk took a wagon-load of cement. Squirrels stored their acorns in the

cavities, and it might have lingered on to this day if, in 1937, a smoker had not flung a cigarette into one of the openings. It blazed up like a chimney, and after the fire Mr. van den Houten's men had the melancholy task of cutting down the burnt-out veteran. Now, I believe, the oldest oak in the Avenue is the fine spreading oak near the South African Public Library entrance. It is sheltered from the south-easter by the Parliament buildings.

Another fire in an oak in the gardens, which remained a mystery for two years, broke out in the middle of the night in 1935. Smoke and sparks came from an opening far above the ground, and the fire brigade was called out. When the dying oak had to be felled in May 1937 traces of wax showed that the bees had been there. Then a smoke apparatus was discovered far down in the trunk. It was clear that a honey snatcher had been at work in the darkness. He had dropped the lighted smoker into the trunk by accident and cleared off in alarm when he saw that he had set the oak on fire.

Oaks provide wonderful timber, but the trees themselves are not so tough as they look. Nails and names carved on the bark may have serious effects. Nevertheless, there is one well-known oak in the gardens which has grown round an old pump and survived. The pump is a relic of the days when the gardens were watered from wells.

Turkey oaks from the Mediterranean, grown in the municipal nursery at Newlands, are used as replacements in the Avenue nowadays. They grow slowly, but resist insect pests and diseases more easily than the English oaks. Princess Elizabeth in 1947 planted an English oak at the foot of the Avenue from seed brought from the Royal Park at Windsor; but Princess Margaret's oak was an Algerian variety.

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT of Mr. van den Houten's career in Cape Town was the purchase by the Council in 1928 of “Arderne's Garden” – those eleven unique acres of exotic trees at Claremont also known as “The Hill.”

“I used all my influence to secure this jewel-box,” recalled Mr. van den Houten. “It appealed to me from the moment I saw it; and though it cost £10,000, it is worth many times that amount. The place may not attract the same number of people as the Cape Town gardens, but the right type go there – the real garden lovers. The softness of the luxurious foliage at Claremont appeals to me. It reminds many people of Europe. The climate is different at Claremont, of course, the south-easter passes over it and it is sheltered from north-west gales.”

This garden was once part of the Stellenberg estate, granted by Simon van der Stel to Jacobus Vogel at the end of the seventeenth century. Mr. R. H. Arderne, upholsterer and undertaker, bought it in 1834 and named it “The Hill.” It remained a stretch of untouched veld and bush until his son, Henry Arderne, laid it out as a garden. Henry Arderne was an attorney, but botany was his passion and many of his admirers regarded him as the greatest amateur gardener South Africa had ever known. He trekked deep into the countryside seeking new species and rarities and transplanting them. *Watsonia Arderne*, with its white blossoms, now famous all over the world, was named in his honour when the Royal Horticultural Society elected him to membership. He found the plant near Worcester.

As you enter the garden by the main gate you encounter a huge Norfolk Island with a well-known story. Arderne had promised his wife a new dress at the time when he was still a struggling attorney. Before his wife could spend the £5 earmarked for it, a ship from the Pacific put into Table Bay. The captain offered Arderne the tiny pine in a pot – for £5. He bought it instead of the dress. It has now reached a height of 135 feet – the first of the species ever to take root in South Africa.

By such sacrifices the garden grew. Arderne's partner, Charles Aiken Fairbridge, brought a dragon tree from Teneriffe; flame trees and ferns came from Australia, camphors and giant bamboos from Japan, a banyan from Bengal, aloes from Mexico, golden oaks from the United States, cork oaks from Italy, maples from Canada, deodars from the Himalayas.

Arderne did not neglect South African flora, but his great aim was acclimatisation of species never before seen in this country. He succeeded magnificently. The terraces and the rivulet became a botanical wonderland. When the British Association met in Cape Town early this century, world-famous botanists gazed enthralled on the glory of "Arderne's Garden."

The first rhododendrons imported into the Cape from England were introduced by the father of the late Sir John Kotze, and planted at Leeuwenhof in the Gardens. Arderne saw them there and sent for plants of his own. Some of those planted half a century ago are still flourishing at Claremont.

H. M. Arderne died in 1914, but Mr. S. J. Wilks, the new owner, maintained the heritage until he died in 1926. There was then a serious danger of the land being cut up as building plots. As I have said, Mr. van den Houten did not plead with the City Council in vain.

LATE IN the eighteenth century the Dutch East India Company's resident official in charge of the False Bay area was one Kirsten. He owned land near the present national botanic gardens at Kirstenbosch, and that, no doubt, is the origin of the name. The late Dr. P. W. Laidler; the historian, however, says that this unspoilt kloof was known to early woodcutters as "Hell."

Kirstenbosch is such a recent pleasure that such famous gardening writers of the nineteenth-twenties, Dorothea Fairbridge and Marion Cran, had practically nothing to say about it. Cecil Rhodes bought the land as far back as 1895 and saw to it that the oaks and Spanish chestnuts and camphor trees were planted along the road he had laid out. But it was not until 1913 that the House of Assembly decided unanimously to develop this Crown land and create a national botanic garden. The late Dr. Harold Pearson had explored the area by Cape cart and selected it; and his part in the enterprise is summed up admirably by the words on the stone cross over his grave in the gardens: "If ye seek his monument, look around."

When it came to details, the man who transformed the wild "Hell" into modern Kirstenbosch was the first curator, Mr. J. W. Mathews. Trained at

Kew, he was a Cape Town nurseryman until 1913, when he was appointed curator. He toiled there until he retired in 1936, turning the wilderness into a treasure-house of South African wild flowers. He planned the rockeries and terraces, the stone paths and famous lawn.

Mathews travelled again and again to Namaqualand at the time of the spring flowers, camping wherever he could collect seeds, always returning with rare plants. People all over Southern Africa assisted him by sending specimens. Proteas, heaths, aloes, succulents flowed in. (The protea collection has long been the largest in the world). Nowhere else is the whole botanical beauty of the Union concentrated within 1,200 acres.

Mr. Hilbert Werner, the present curator, took up gardening as a schoolboy, and flowers have filled his life. He told me that a curator's year has to be planned with as much care as any business venture; there is something inevitable about the great landscape, and there are few slack periods.

January is the month when seeds are cleaned in preparation for orders from all over the world. Botanic gardens everywhere honour this custom; they compile lists and supply each other with seeds free of charge. Another list goes out to nurserymen – seeds at so much an ounce, or per hundred. In February the seeds of bulbs and succulents are sown. March finds

Kirstenbosch most active, for Mr. Werner has to plan the display of annuals which will draw thousands to the gardens in spring. Here is a secret of Kirstenbosch technique. “We do not plant the same annual in the same spot every year – we aim at giving a fresh picture,” pointed out Mr. Werner. “All the annuals are planted out by hand, so that the colours harmonize. There is no mixing of species. It is the long and difficult way, but it shows up each species in its full beauty.”

Young proteas are planted out from tins in April, while many rare succulents in pots are taken indoors. Coming from dry regions, they dislike the Peninsula's rains. On the other hand bulbs and corms belonging to the winter rainfall area are placed in the open. Spring annuals are planted out in April and May. Mr. Werner's staff go indoors in the depths of winter to clean and packet seeds and make the seed-sowing tins called “flats”. Thousands of seedlings of Erica and other species are planted out in the heath garden during June and July.

One part of Kirstenbosch of which the general public sees little is the economic section. Here one finds drugs like “Deadly Nightshade”; caraway seed for cakes; coriander and pennyroyal for the kitchen; Sweet Basil; Marjoram, castor oil and many more exotic species. August is the month

when beds are dug and prepared for the sowing of summer types of economic seeds.

September is Mr. Werner's busiest month. The spring display of annuals draws the crowds; and in the week-ends you may see Mr. Werner (and, of course, the director, Professor R. H. Compton), on collecting trips in the Darling and Hopefield districts. Many spring annuals were lost during the war, *Nemesia* species and others, and Mr. Werner will not rest until they have been reintroduced.

In October hours of hard work must be devoted to naming and staging the Kirstenbosch exhibit of cut flowers and succulents at the Cape Horticultural Society's show. This is an essential part of the educational value of Kirstenbosch. November is a month of seed-collecting and clearing away of plant annuals in the gardens. December finds Mr. Werner bringing the seed lists up to date, and sowing shrubs and trees under glass.

Trees are among Mr. Werner's main interests, and he is building up a collection of indigenous trees at Kirstenbosch. It is not generally realized, perhaps, that stinkwood and one of the yellow-woods are native to Table Mountain; though Mr. Werner has found only one stinkwood tree of commercial size. The early colonists were ruthless with useful timber.

Mr. Werner also has a deep personal interest in orchids, and he is probably the only South African with a full overseas training in the subject. There is not much scope for this experience at Kirstenbosch, which specialises in South African flora. The red and blue disas of Table Mountain are the only showy local orchids; and although the Western Province is rich in terrestrial orchids, their wonderful botanical interest is greater than their beauty. Mr. Werner may discover a new orchid one of these days, but you will not see it growing in the gardens.

Among the daily tasks which Mr. Werner enjoys is the examination of plants, seeds and bulbs sent to Kirstenbosch from many far corners of Africa. A parcel may contain seeds of *Erica nobilis* from a district forest officer in the Cape – or *Welwitschia Miraabilis* from South-West Africa. Every item is entered in the register which has been kept ever since the gardens opened in 1913, and which now forms an almost complete record of localities of South African plants.

Unexpected tasks also occur. Some time ago Mr. Werner was called upon to repair the so-called Lady Anne Barnard's bath, which sprang a leak. “Rather a difficult job without a blueprint – and the legends did not help,” remarked Mr. Werner. I gather that the Kirstenbosch authorities are sometimes a little

irked by the undying public belief that Lady Anne Barnard was in the habit of bathing in this lovely oval bath at the head of Fern Dell.

Lady Anne described her daily experiences in vivid detail; but never did she mention this bath. It is true that she lived at “Paradise,” within easy riding distance. Nevertheless, it is much more likely that the Miss Eksteens, daughters of the owner of Kirstenbosch in 1823, used the bath while their slaves girls kept watch against intruders.

CHAPTER 13

CAPE TOWN CHARACTERS

CAPE TOWN has seen a long gallery of strange characters, and historians have often revived such odd personalities as Joseph Suasso de Lima, poet and publisher, Moses the money-changer and “Queen” Rebecca, the ex-slave who thought she was heir to the throne of England. Within living memory there have been others, and I am inclined to place Wallagie near the top of the list. Wallagie, a Malay woodcutter who lived at Claremont, died about twenty years ago. He was Cape Town's champion trencherman, probably a world champion if he had been put to the test.

Wallagie means “wonderful,” and his appetite is still discussed in tones of awe by those who knew him. He was a huge, muscular man, but not a fat, paunchy type. As a rule, he ate normal meals. Then something would move him to give those legendary displays which earned him the name of Wallagie. One day his employer sent him out to work in the suburbs and gave him a chit asking a shopkeeper to supply Wallagie with food for his lunch. Wallagie had a strong and peculiar sense of humour. After a healthy morning's work chopping down trees he presented his chit and ate one of his more remarkable lunches. When the bill came in Wallagie's employer

refused to pay. The case came before the Civil Court at Caledon Square, and the shopkeeper declared that Wallagie had eaten the food in the shop before his eyes. The magistrate refused to believe this evidence, and judgment was given for the small amount tendered by the defendant. Only when the case was over did Wallagie confess to his employer that he had eaten everything claimed by the shopkeeper.

The meal that is still remembered by the Malays was a feast arranged for sixteen guests, including Wallagie, at the end of Ramadan. Tables were spread with the usual lavish array of dates, “buba” soup, rice cakes, pastries, curries with atjar and blatjang, sweet potatoes in batter, chickens and rice – the Moslem menu of the year. Smilingly the host invited the redoubtable Wallagie to see what he could do before the other guests started. Wallagie accepted, and began eating in his usual deliberate manner, with obvious relish. He cleared the tables. All the food for sixteen people vanished down his throat, and a fresh meal had to be cooked. By this time Wallagie had recovered his appetite and made another hearty meal, though he was considerate enough to leave something for the others.

Wallagie could polish off watermelons as though they were strawberries. Once he encountered a farmer with a wagon-load of watermelons, and laid a

bet of £1 that he would eat the lot. He ate fourteen, and then the desperate farmer called the bet off. There are other tales of Wallagie's prowess with hardboiled penguin eggs and crawfish, but the figures are fantastic. Hadji Amor Arend, well-known in his day as a race-horse owner, vouched for one of Wallagie's feats, carried out in his presence. That was when Wallagie drank 144 large bottles of sweet ginger-beer at a sitting.

A cafe owner named Effendi, of Station Road, Claremont, once challenged Wallagie to consume a twenty-pound tapioca pudding. Wallagie not only finished the pudding, but topped off his meal with two large loaves, a bucket of ice-cream and a paraffin-tin of lemonade. It is said that in his heyday Wallagie ate up a whole cafe, so that the owner went insolvent. Buns, biscuits, fruit, sweets, mineral waters – Wallagie was on his mettle and he left the shelves empty.

In a pancake and pumpkin fritter contest at Claremont, the cooks were worn out before Wallagie stopped eating. He ate steadily and relentlessly and when no more food was forthcoming he washed down his meal with all the minerals in the cafe.

Wallagie's last great feat was performed in a Long Street cafe. This was another challenge, and the Indian proprietor put out a hundred polonies, an

eight-pound cheese, four sandwich loaves and four dozen bottles of ginger-beer. On this occasion Wallagie did not finish the repast; but the challenger was afraid he would, and begged Wallagie to leave some of the food untouched.

After these displays Wallagie never suffered from indigestion. He died as a result of an accident. No one has ever explained his powers but shrewd Malay business men who watched him eat were sorry that they did not organize an overseas tour for him. No doubt Wallagie's achievements have been exaggerated since his death, but there is little doubt that he would have made the hotdog and hamburger champions of Coney Island look like patients on a strict diet.

MUCH MORE widely known than Wallagie was Lawrence Arthur Hollern, the “Charlie Chaplin” of Cape Town's pavements and waterfront. It was easy to discern pathos in Hollern's way of life, but there was more of it than people realized when this frail old man scrambled for coins during his last years. Hollern was eighty when he died in Groote Schuur hospital in September, 1946. American by birth, he started his career as a circus contortionist; and he performed as an acrobat on board Mississippi

showboats. Between 1895 and 1921 he appeared in almost every music-hall in Britain. George Robey, Marie Lloyd and Harry Tate were among his friends.

Hard times in the vaudeville world drove him to South Africa in 1921, but it was not until 1925 that he appeared in the bowler and baggy trousers of Charlie Chaplin. On board the outgoing mail boats there were often music-hall artists who had known Hollern during his better days; and at the docks he made enough to pay for his cubicle at the Salvation Army Metropole.

Sir Seymour Hicks once watched Hollern's antics with tears in his eyes. He threw half-crowns on to the quay whenever Hollern's back was turned – eight half-crowns before the ship drew away. “I was at his wedding,” said Sir Seymour Hicks. “I was a struggling young actor and he was a comedian in one of London's most successful shows. Now he has to do this for a living.” He waved, and Hollern waved back. “I admit nothing,” said Hollern when he was questioned after this dramatic meeting. Forgotten by all but an actor at the top of the tree, Lawrence Hollern still had his pride.

It was in 1938 that Hollern met with the accident that many had expected for years. The ageing acrobat often performed dangerously on the edge of the quay. One afternoon he leant backwards too far, and fell, still clasping

his bowler hat and cane. He fell on to the timber fender between the *Balmoral Castle* and the quay. A dockhand and a quartermaster from the ship climbed down to the rescue, but they had difficulty in controlling Hollern. Injured though he was, the old stager kept shouting: "Let me up – I must give my show." When the ambulance arrived a stretcher was lowered by crane and a sadly-bruised "Charlie" was taken to hospital. "My downfall was not due to being over ambitious," Hollern explained afterwards. "I slipped in a pool of oil."

He was in bed for a month, and then he resumed his quayside. antics until World War II closed the docks. After that he had to earn what he could by entertaining cinema queues. Though he was a familiar figure to many thousands of people, only a few knew that the face beneath the thick grease-paint was the face of a tragic old man.

IT IS often like that with pavement entertainers. Carlo Lotierzo, the harpist, was playing in the streets of Cape Town for years while Hollern was impersonating Charlie Chaplin at the docks. Lotierzo had been a regular musician at Government House, Adelaide. He had played at State balls and

conducted his own academy of music. The “talkies” finished him, and he took to wandering with his harp.

Between the wars, too, there was Charles Ham, the old street violinist. A musician nearly all his life, he was once leader of fashionable orchestras all over Britain and the Continent. Then he went to sea as violinist in the old *Carisbrook Castle*, came on shore in Cape Town after a number of voyages, served in the Cape Mounted Rifles for seven years, and went back to the violin in a circus band. Ham had played in cinema orchestras, too, but like Carlo Lotierzo the “talkies” sent him into the streets.

Street singers are uncommon in Cape Town, though everyone knows Arthur Edward Patrick Rowley, with his tall, distinguished appearance, handsome features and grey hair. Rowley's cultured speech is not a pose. He once told me that he was Lord Kitchener's interpreter in the Sudan during the Fashoda incident, which means that he is well on in the seventies.

Some years ago Rowley used to take his seat in a leading café and intimate that he was prepared either to eat a free meal or sing – and he got his dinner. The proprietor finally appointed Rowley commissioner, a post which he filled with dignity – for a time.

In court he was unpredictable. Charged one day with singing and breaking a globe in his cell, he replied: "As there was no electric bell and no parlour maid, I had to make a noise to call the warder. You see, I wanted to shave."

He always referred to his singing as "my professional operations" and declared that he gave full value for money. "Have you ever felt the real pangs of cruel hunger?" he once asked a constable who arrested him for begging.

Rowley spoke to me of his occasional absences from the Cape Town streets. At the Salvation Army Social Farm he had to rise at 2 a.m. daily and milk a hundred cows. "I am now an expert cow milker," he remarked. He spent a long period in a Transvaal work colony, and returned with an exemplary discharge.

"Work and Rowley do not agree, but anyone who escaped from that place was liable to be eaten by lions," he explained. Commenting on a recent spell in Roeland Street gaol, he declared: "The food was better cooked in the old days, and there was more of it."

Rowley exists on a South African War pension of £9 10s. a month. "I pay the Salvation Army £4 a month for board and lodging, and the rest is pocket-money," he told me.

ANOTHER CHARACTER of the streets known to everyone in Cape Town between the wars was George Woollends, the bootblack. Woollends was a Londoner who went to New Zealand at an early age and took part in the Second Maori War – hence the medal which he often wore. He was a sheep-shearer. Early this century he was earning a living in South Africa as a horse-breaker; and when horses went out of favour he became a bootblack. Though this is now a dying craft, there were once a dozen bootblacks in Adderley Street, and Woollends could make five shillings a day without difficulty.

A few years before World War II he had to use his wits again, for no one seemed to want their boots polished. So at the age of 85, Woollends took to making hammocks, tennis nets and other network. He slung his hammock on the Standard Bank railings and lay there watching the crowds hopefully. One day he confided to me: “I am the only man who has ever had official permission from the City Council to sleep in Adderley Street.”

CAPE TOWN'S most eccentric citizen within living memory, I should say, was Michiel Hiddingh of Newlands. For nearly forty years his whims and

unpredictable largesse were a cause for wonder among all who came in contact with him.

The first of the Hiddings, a judge, arrived at the Cape from Holland early last century. His son, Dr. Jonas Michiel Hiddingh, was a wealthy medical practitioner who bought Newlands House and the large surrounding estate in 1859, rebuilt the old brewery, and added greatly to his fortune by the sale of beer.

Dr. Hiddingh was married but childless. He wanted an heir who would carry on the business and also maintain the beautiful estate as one of the show places of the Cape Peninsula. So he sent to Holland for a nephew, Michiel Hiddingh, who was seven years old when he landed in 1867. It would have been better for little Michiel if he had remained in Holland and led a normal life, free from the influence of the riches which were to have such disastrous effects on him. His uncle and aunt bullied him and instructed his schoolmasters to cane him on the least provocation. The luxurious atmosphere of Newlands House was for him a scene of youthful misery. It changed his character and ruined his life.

Michiel had brains, however, and did well at college in Cape Town and England as an agricultural chemist. He also became a first-class shot. After he

had qualified his uncle made him work in the brewery – a task for which he had no inclination. At the age of twenty-one Michiel made one sensible move when he informed his uncle that he wanted privacy and asked for the Red House, a single-storeyed house of eight rooms near the southern boundary of the estate. This request was granted.

During a visit to England the unhappy young man met a girl he wished to marry. His future was in the hands of his uncle, however, and the uncle opposed the engagement. Michiel Hiddingh returned to Cape Town more warped than ever. He withdrew into himself, studied many subjects, and acquired such a wide medical knowledge that friends in the profession described him as “nine tenths a doctor.”

Dr. Hiddingh died in 1888, too late to release the twenty-eight year-old Michiel from the complexes of youth. Although part of the estate was entailed, Michiel became heir to a great deal of valuable property and a very large income.

It is clear that Dr. Hiddingh was proud of historic Newlands House, his private park where fallow deer roamed, his flourishing brewery and chain of tied houses. “He had hoped that the whole property would remain in the

Hiddingh family, and that Michiel and his descendants would live there in grandeur for generations.

The estate had been laid out by William Adriaan van der Stel as far back as 1700 to supplement the supply of vegetables to ships. Governor Ryk van Tulbagh built the original house in 1750 and entertained the Abbé de la Caille and other distinguished visitors there. Stavorinus wrote of a huge apricot tree that shaded twenty men beneath its boughs. Bougainville, in 1759, described the high hedges and planted some of the oaks that still stand.

Newlands House, indeed, with its white gables and twisted chimneys, is one of the oldest and finest country houses in the Cape. Sir David Baird and other early British governors lived there. Las Cases, former secretary to Napoleon, wrote an ecstatic description of his three months' stay. "It might have been accounted a pleasant residence even in Europe," he declared. "When left to ourselves in this delightful place we felt we had been suddenly removed from a prison to Paradise. The elegantly furnished apartments; the dovecots, the birds, flowerbeds, groves and delightful walks, the silence and solitude all presented a magical effect that reminded us of Zernire and Azor."

Lord Charles Somerset tried to build a second storey, but the roof fell in during a storm. Newlands House was rebuilt in 1828, and soon afterwards it

was sold to Mr. W. J. Louw at the bargain price of £3,025. He sold it to Mr. J. Cruywagen, who disposed of part of the estate. Nevertheless, there were still twenty-nine morgen round the house when Dr. Hiddingh bought it.

Michiel Hiddingh cared for none of this. He liked the doctor's Jersey cattle and attended personally to their ailments. But he refused to be bothered with the brewery and rented all the public house and canteens to Anders Ohlsson for £2,300 a year.

After the death of his aunt Michiel Hiddingh could have lived amid the splendour of Newlands House. He preferred to let it. (Newlands House again became a temporary Government House for a period, and during the First World War it was used as a nursing home. A later tenant was Gwelo Goodman, the artist). Not long after his uncle's death in 1888, Michiel Hiddingh began exhibiting those peculiarities which baffled his acquaintances. One day he decided not to have a fire in any of the grates in the Red House. For the rest of his life his winter guests shivered. Argumentative and suspicious to a degree, he lost friends who had given him no provocation. "I am a man of moods," he often admitted. But this was a deep-seated abnormality of outlook, far more serious than moodiness. You could not call him a hermit, for he was fond of entertaining in his own

queer way. He did not lack public spirit, for he was Mayor of Claremont in 1894, and a shrewd and conscientious mayor he made. It was just that no one could fathom the twisted mind. For this reason he had no close friends, and though often there were many people round him he was essentially a lonely man.

In the hall of the Red House stood a number of marble statues, selected by Dr. Hiddingh. Michiel had no appreciation of any form of art, and the statues remained for years draped in pink muslin. The house was literally the Red House; solidly built, it needed no paint, but Michiel smothered it in fresh red paint every year. When electricity became available he refused to have the Red House wired. All his life he used paraffin lamps. Though he kept a number of electric torches handy, friends going out into the darkness were given lighted tapers. No telephone was ever installed. There was a bath-room in the house, of course, but Michiel had the bath taken out. He preferred to have a hipbath brought into his bedroom every morning.

Works of art adorned the walls; but Michiel was contemptuous of them. If a newspaper article appealed to him, however, he would have it framed and hung up. Articles with a special appeal for him were those denouncing or ridiculing doctors. No doubt he was still angry with his dead uncle.

Visitors were inspected through a slit at the side of the front door. If Michiel did not like the look of them, a servant handed them a slate bearing the words: "If anybody wants to see me on business, please don't come and bother me at my house." Sometimes he sent friends away and whistled them back: Those who gained admission to the Red House experienced hospitality on a crazy scale.

Michiel's wine cellar would have stocked a large hotel. He ordered scores of cases of whisky and champagne at a time, and never bought a consignment of less than sixty thousand expensive cigars. All his entertaining was done round the dining-room table. The drawing-room remained closed. At meals an astonished guest would find a whole chicken, or even a whole turkey on his plate; and Michiel was offended if any portion was left. Glasses were replenished the moment the level fell. Michiel had no use for bells when he wanted his servants – he summoned them to his table by a blast on a police whistle.

Something of an epicure, Michiel's favourite dish was curried penguin eggs. He employed Cape coloured women as his cooks, and they served the traditional Cape dishes to perfection. Cooks and other servants did not easily adjust themselves to Michiel's queer ways, however, and only one

remained loyal. He was a coloured man, William, who served his eccentric master for twenty-three years. William survived many shocks. One day Michiel accused him of stealing a gold tooth-pick. Next day Michiel found his tooth-pick in his dining-room chair, and made amends by doubling William's wages and handing him a glass of whisky.

Michiel pressed whisky on all sorts of people. When coloured flower-sellers came to the door he bought all their flowers and sent them away with bottles of whisky and boxes of chocolates. Yet he decorated his home with ugly artificial flowers.

Ministers of religion who called with subscription lists were baited unmercifully. Michiel pestered them to drink with him, and usually refused to part with his money unless they did. "Can't you take your drink like men?" he would demand angrily. Once he managed to send a clergyman off a little the worse for wear, and he was delighted.

He kept twenty cats at the Red House, and fed them royally in the dining-room. Nevertheless, he insisted on great cleanliness in his house, and a guest who dropped cigar ash on the floor was snubbed immediately.

When one of his coloured servants broke a wrist Michiel attended to the injury himself. He made the servant sit down at the dining table, cut up the

food and fed him. Yet this same tall, hearty-looking Hollander was for ever lamenting the fact that slavery had been abolished. Michiel treated everyone alike – a coloured servant or a visiting doctor. But no one ever knew what the treatment would be. Once a man came with a request for £1 to buy a pair of boots. He went off with a new hat, a case of whisky and a box of cigars – but still without the boots. For a long time after motor-cars arrived Michiel would have nothing to do with them. He often drove to Hout Bay by dog-cart, and organized gorgeous hunting trips to Stellenbosch and Somerset West. It meant leaving Newlands at three a.m., but the picnic hampers were sumptuous, and the farmer who invited him could rely on a case of vintage champagne. Last century Michiel held deer shoots on the estate; for the herd had to be thinned out from time to time. He was a crack shot himself, and if one of his guests wounded but failed to kill a deer there would be no second invitation. In the end, however, this lover of animals sickened of shooting and sold the herd of fallow deer, about a hundred head, to a Somerset West farmer.

Mountaineering, chess and bridge were among his pastimes. For a period Michiel was a well-known figure on the Cape racecourses; but he gave it up suddenly and was seen there no more. He spent hours peering into his microscope. His favourite textbook was an obsolete work on poisons.

At last Michiel took up motoring, but never as the owner of a car. He spent at least £1,500 a year on the hire of cars at one suburban garage alone. The drivers loved him.

Among the Claremont shopkeepers he was known fondly as “Old Mike.” He would stalk in with a bag of sovereigns and place orders such as no man before or since has given. In some ways a child, he found it difficult to pass an interesting shop window. Again and again he bought up the entire stock of a food shop and gave everything away to the poor. He would load his hired car with springbok, pheasant, partridges and hams – and hand them out in the street.

Often he revealed a childish sense of humour. He saw some fly papers in a shop-window, turned to a hopeful group of street urchins and told them to plaster each other with the sticky papers. He stood roaring with laughter until the fight was over, and then gave each child half a sovereign. Michiel always carried a walking stick, and he liked to deliver a whack with it if he saw a coloured man bending over some task. When the astonished man straightened up a sovereign would be pressed into his hand.

His gifts were always on the grand scale. On a farm one day the farmer's son mentioned that he would like to take up shooting. Next time he called

Michiel brought with him a rifle and 50,00 rounds of ammunition. Many of his gifts were foolish rather than generous. Yet the strange Michiel also did good by stealth. He lured doctors out for drives with him and took them to the sick poor. He paid for operations – which he regarded as a last resort – and supplied the dying with every imaginable comfort. He hated publicity. Hundreds of appealing letters reached him, and these he scrutinized with the utmost care and made a close personal investigation of some which seemed genuine.

His favourite author was the German philosopher Schopenhauer. Many who would have preferred whisky received copies of Schopenhauer's works.

For some years before his death Michiel Hiddingh suffered from heart disease. When he knew that the end was near he refused to go to bed, for he had always said there would be no deathbed for him. He sat up in his revolving-chair, as jolly as it was possible for him to be, entertaining friends to the last. Thus he died, on September 11, 1927, at the age of sixty-seven, tragic victim of wealth – and a stupid uncle and aunt.

Naturally there were many who awaited the opening of Michiel Hiddingh's will with feelings of hope which could not have amounted to certainty.

The will was as freakish as the man himself. He left about £40,000 to friends, but nothing to his relations. (Some of his relations were provided for under Dr. Hiddings's will.) And he left £80,000 to various institutions and charities which he had turned down during his lifetime. For example, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals knew him as a lover of animals, but had never succeeded in extracting a penny from him. Michiel Hiddings put the S.P.C.A. down for £5,000.

Other bequests included £20,000 for the free dispensary, £5,000 for the New Somerset Hospital, £5,000 for the Old Men's Home, £10,000 for the deaf and dumb institute at Worcester. It was typical, unexpected, characteristic of a man who was often a fool with his money, yet who really knew all the time where his money would do the most good.

CHAPTER 14

DOCTOR JAMES BARRY

DOCTOR JAMES BARRY, first woman doctor and greatest male impersonator of last century, has suffered much from the imaginations of novelists and dramatists. The true story, I find, is more fantastic than the books based on interludes in her long career. It is all of a pattern, whether she is duelling in Cape Town, treating yellow fever in the West Indies, or riding through Montreal in her sleigh.

I discovered Doctor Barry, enough of her to explain some of the mysteries, in the archives and libraries of Cape Town; in memories of people who had known her, recorded in old newspapers; and above all, in the anecdotes handed down in old Cape families and still told to this day. So I intend to follow her vivid progress through life without once stretching your credulity beyond the point where serious historians become restless.

Her origin will probably never be proved beyond doubt. Lord Albemarle, who described her in *Fifty Years of My Life*, says she was the legitimate granddaughter of a Scotch earl. Britain's sober *Dictionary of National Biography* confirms the statement. Edinburgh University records show

clearly enough that the Earl of Buchan was responsible for James Barry, medical student.

Other writers have declared that her name at birth in 1795 was Joan Fitzroy, and that the Prince Regent was her father. Olga Racster and Jessica Grove, joint authors of a play and novel based on her life, believe that her father was the Duke of York, second son of George III, while her mother was the daughter of a Miss Barry, daughter of General Barry.

All that can be said with certainty is that throughout her career, and in spite of her most outrageous behaviour, she remained under high protection. Everywhere she went there is strong evidence of powerful influence at work on her behalf.

She first takes shape as a character during her student days. Other students wore shooting jackets; she disguised her slim, feminine figure with a long frock-coat. Doctor Jobson, who was there at the same time, recalled that Barry was afraid of the rough quarters of the town. He tried to teach Barry boxing, but she was always guarding her chest. Finally she took up fencing and became so skilful with the rapier that the jeers were less frequent.

In 1812, at the age of seventeen, she qualified in medicine. Records of the British War Office revealed her career from July 5, 1813, when she joined

the army as a hospital assistant. She served in Spain and Belgium, and it is possible that she was present at Waterloo. Then she was posted to India; and early in 1817 she reported for duty as staff surgeon to the Cape Town garrison. She lodged at the Widow Sandenberg's boarding-house, No. 12, Heerengracht.

From this moment Doctor James Barry becomes as visible as a film heroine. Not only Lord Albemarle, but many other distinguished visitors to the Cape made a point of describing the queer little doctor.

About five feet in height, she had soles three inches thick fitted to her boots. Lord Albermarle sat next to her at a mess dinner; for Governor Lord Charles Somerset had praised the skill of young Doctor Barry, and Albemarle was anxious to meet her. "In this learned pundit I beheld a beardless lad, apparently of my own age, with an unmistakable Scotch type of countenance, reddish hair and high cheek bones," wrote Albemarle. "There was a certain effeminacy in his manner which he seemed to be always striving to overcome. His style of conversation was greatly superior to that usually heard at a mess table in those days. A mystery attached to Doctor Barry's whole professional career. Quarrelsome and frequently guilty of

flagrant breaches of discipline, he was sent home several times under arrest. His offences were always condoned at headquarters.”

Besides increasing her height, Doctor Barry made her frail body appear more impressive with the aid of towels. The coloured people of Cape Town called her in Afrikaans, the “Kapok dokter”. “Kapok” means cotton-wool, and they thought she stuffed the shoulders of her uniform jacket with it.

Even then, I suppose, there were people with enough knowledge of psychology to realize that Doctor Barry was over-compensating herself for her physical handicaps. She carried a huge dragoon's sword and wore long spurs. Her temper was hung on a hair-trigger, and her insults, delivered in a high, squeaky voice, involved her in constant trouble.

“I should much like to cut off your ears,” she screamed at one high official. This was her favourite threat. One day a clergyman sent Barry a polite note asking her to pull an aching tooth. She flew into a towering rage. “Does this stupid parson suppose that I am a vulgar tooth-drawer?” she demanded. “If he had personally made this application, his cloth would not have saved his ears.”

She then went to a coloured farrier, Thomas, and informed him that the clergyman's donkey needed attention. Thomas arrived at the house with

hand-vices and pincers. When the clergyman asked what it meant, Thomas replied: "Doctor Barry has instructed me to come without delay to draw the tooth of a donkey."

The clergyman complained to Lord Charles Somerset, who replied: "No one pays attention to what Doctor Barry does or says. You had better join in the laugh against yourself."

Every day the doctor fed her black poodle Psyche at Saunders's confectionery shop. She rode round Cape Town in full-dress uniform and cocked hat, on a pony, with an umbrella over her head, accompanied by her black man-servant. The padded saddle was of her own design, and once in it she remained firmly wedged.

Lord Charles Somerset spoke of Barry to Albemarle as "one of the most skilful of physicians and the most wayward of men." Somerset spoilt and shielded her to the limit, but she was no respecter of persons, and many a fierce argument she had with him.

Many a patient remembered Doctor Barry with gratitude, however, and passed on tales of her tender ways. One woman at Wynberg must have sensed the doctor's sex, for she told her: "No man could show such sympathy with one in pain."

Among her early patients at the Cape was the dying Lady Brenton, wife of Vice-Admiral Sir Jahleel Brenton. In his reminiscences Brenton wrote: “This extraordinary young man had undergone a most rigid examination before the College of Physicians and had, by the correctness of his answers and the extent of his abilities extorted from them his diploma, with which he had practised with the most extraordinary success. Had not the firm conviction taken place in my mind that the nature of my beloved Isabella's disorder was beyond the reach of human skill, I should have derived the most sanguine hopes from his advice.”

This was the period of Napoleon's exile on St. Helena. On the staff at Longwood was Count de Las Cases, afterwards Napoleon's biographer. The Count was detected attempting to send a letter secretly to Europe; and in 1817 he arrived at the Cape with his young son Emmanuel. They were housed at the Castle, more or less under arrest.

Las Cases overworked his son as a penman, the lad broke down, and Doctor Barry was called in. Her appearance startled Las Cases, for he wrote that she had “the form, the manners and the voice of a woman.” Nevertheless, he was impressed by her advice, for she had been recommended to him as an “absolute phenomenon who had saved the life of one of the Governor's

daughters after she had been given up, which rendered him a sort of favourite in the family.” Barry cheered Las Cases and often visited him and his son as a friend. Las Cases declared that he found her “very agreeable.”

The most persistent story of Barry's skill concerns a difficult maternity case, and had an odd sequel. Barry was called in by Thomans Munnik, a wealthy snuff-manufacturer of Riebeek Square, whose wife appeared to be dying in childbirth. According to the legend, Barry delivered the baby by means of a Caesarean operation; mother and baby survived and Barry was feted at the Christening dinner.

Barry was a physician, and in all the array of medical documents bearing on her career I cannot find a scrap of evidence suggesting that she ever practised major surgery. If she had, in those days before antiseptics and anaesthetics, it is doubtful whether Mrs. Munnik would have recovered.

But the sequel is beyond dispute. The boy delivered by Barry was named James Barry Munnik. He became godfather to the late General Hertzog, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa for many years between the wars. Hertzog's full name was James Barry Munnik Hertzog. One day a Cape Town editor, lunching with Hertzog, began discussing the legend.

Strange to say, Hertzog had never heard of it, and seemed to dislike the idea of a link with such an eccentric character.

IN AN era of hearty eating and reckless drinking, Doctor Barry formed her own theories. She bought meat for her dog, but never touched it herself. Her diet was largely vegetarian. She liked fruit, and she took a goat everywhere with her for the milk. Champagne and brandy she drank only when ill; at all other times she was abstemious. Often she advised her patients to bathe in Cape wine, which would have had an antiseptic effect.

I admired Barry most when I read her own medical reports in the Cape archives. There you see her as the outspoken champion of the poor, of the prisoners in the vile gaol, of lunatics and lepers. She exposed scandal after scandal, bringing relief and comfort to wretched souls existing under cruel conditions.

Those yellow pages in the archives weigh the scales heavily in her favour. Her faults arose almost entirely from the life of deception she had adopted. Yet it cannot be disputed that in her work among the lowest of human beings James Barry, first woman doctor, set an inspiring example.

You find her warning the authorities that “ignorant and mercenary shop-keepers” were selling such dangerous drugs as opium and arsenic to the public. She discusses mad dog bite with great common sense, and rejects the use of “eau de Luce” as a cure. A slave boy had been bitten by a puff-adder, and in that case “eau de Luce” had proved ineffective. The prompt application of a red-hot iron to the wound was more likely to succeed. And when a malignant epidemic fever known as “rot koorts” broke out in the Zwartland she diagnosed it as the typhus of Europe and laid down the treatment.

Quacks who appeared before Barry for examination as apothecaries, chemists and druggists went away cursing, and without certificates. She fixed the fees which district surgeons could demand. When the town's water supply was under suspicion she inspected the spring in Mr. Breda's garden, found it pure and wholesome, and traced the cause of the trouble. The water was cut off at the reservoir every night, so that the empty iron pipes rusted. On her advice the pumps throughout the town were locked at night, the pipes remained full, and the rust disappeared.

Probably the greatest public service she rendered came about when she heard that the lepers at Hemel en Aarde (Heaven and Earth), in the Caledon

district were being starved and were running away. She set out immediately on horseback with the Rev. Doctor Thom and descended upon the settlement officials like an avenging angel. Here are her own words:

“Nothing could exceed the misery of the lepers. Their clothing was dirty and bad, the food scanty and ill-managed. These miserable people were confined to a small space of the really beautiful and ample land allotted to them. The hospital was squalid and wretched beyond description. One of the sufferers remarked that it was surely better to die of disease than of cruelty and hunger.”

Thanks to her influence with Lord Charles Somerset and her own efficient methods, the leper settlement was reformed. She ordered a diet of milk, rice, coffee and vegetables, mutton and bread, in quantity equal to a soldier's ration, and remarked: “Keen appetite seems almost part of the disease.” And she made sure that ample food was provided. During a later inspection she noted that a place for Divine Service was needed.

Medieval conditions also prevailed in the Cape Town “tronk”. Doctor Barry went in there with her observant eyes and cleansing spirit; and she must almost have wept at the scene of individual suffering and mass degradation.

“In a dungeon in that place I found Jacob Elliott with his thigh fractured, without crutches, without a bed or pillows, blankets dirty in the extreme, without a single comfort, and in short in such a state of misery that if he had not been under the special protection of Providence he could not have survived. He has not been provided with any sort of medical attention which is so much required in his helpless, painful state. Only once in twenty-four hours has the jailer taken him a bucket of water and the common prison allowance.”

Jacob Elliott was typical of the jail. She sent him to hospital and denounced the medical officers responsible for this neglect. But she did not overlook the state of the jail as a whole.

“With the exception of persons in solitary confinement and one or two favoured individuals,” she reported, “the whole mass of prisoners are indiscriminately jumbled together, young and old, without regard to morality, if such a thing may be supposed to exist in a place never visited by a clergyman except, perhaps, on the eve of an execution.”

Officials guilty of this neglect decided that attack was the best defence. Barry was summoned to appear before a Fiscal Commission and answer for the slur cast on the characters of these officials. She tore up the summons

and refused to answer questions on the ground that she had made her report to the Governor and was responsible only to him". The court sentenced her to one month's imprisonment, but Lord Charles Somerset set the sentence aside.

Barry's comment on the proceedings was in the familiar vein. "If I had had my sword on when Mr. Fiscal proposed sending me to the 'trunk' I should certainly have cut off both his ears to make him look smart."

Some of you may suspect that Doctor Barry was a shrew, ready to quarrel with everyone and everything she encountered. Nevertheless, I think her words ring true. She was a merciful, conscientious medical officer, far in advance of her time.

Turn again to the old records in the archives. On this occasion, March 8, 1824, she is inspecting the lunatics in the Somerset Hospital – thirteen men and two women. "The whole establishment appears devoid of cleanliness, order or professional care," she wrote. "One man Scott, working at a trade as cabinet-maker, seemed perfectly sane. Also a Dane, Martin Jensen. There is a woman Francina who is as sane as most people and by no means a subject for a lunatic hospital. Another old female Mina, reported to be over a hundred, is requiring not the miseries but even in the most moderate way

the necessities of life. This poor creature had neither bread nor blanket. The others are lunatics, but they require also a little attention.”

Barry was concerned about the health of the military and colonial chaplains, who were always catching colds in the Cape winter while preforming funeral services in the churchyard. She noted that they were exposed to “sudden and great variations in temperature”, and suggested that a sentry-box on wheels should be provided, similar to those used in England.

At the Cape, private practice came to Barry without seeking it. Her queer ways increased her prestige. When she entered a sick room her first act was to clear away everything ordered by other medical advisers. She opened windows, to the horror of people who still believed that fresh air was harmful. If her patient died she declared it was due to the blunders of previous doctors.

It is noted in the records of the early Cape Medical Society that Barry never called in a consultant. The doctors of Cape Town resented it; but several of them were fair-minded enough to praise Barry's skill and not one dared to criticize her methods as a doctor.

It was rumoured in Cape Town that Barry was a “King's favourite” and that Somerset was kind to her in expectation of favours to come. There is little

doubt that Somerset was the one person who knew her secret before she arrived. He appointed her physician to his own household and promoted her to the rank of Colonial Medical Inspector when she had been only a few weeks in the colony.

This favouritism had serious repercussions. There was a place in the Heerengracht called Dreyer's Corner, where official notices, poems and squibs were posted on the high wall of Mr. Dreyer's stoep. All stopped to read and discuss them. One day an "infamous placard" was left there suggesting an immoral relationship between the Governor and Barry. The author was never discovered.

Another serious incident during her years at the Cape was her duel with an officer named Cloete, later Sir Josias Cloete. Many reasons for the quarrel have been given. According to one account they were riding together on the Cape Flats when Cloete remarked: "You ride more like a woman than a man." Barry slashed him across the face with her riding whip.

Another version has it that Barry and Cloete were at Government House one night and noticed that Lord Charles Somerset was paying attention to one of the guests.

“That's a nice Dutch filly the Governor has got hold of,” remarked Barry in her most offensive manner.

“Retract your vile expression, you infernal little cad,” blazed Cloete in the pompous language of the day.

That a duel was fought there is no doubt; some say with pistols, others with swords. Judge Cole vouched for it in his reminiscences. According to all accounts, no one was hurt. But it is also on record that Cloete was posted to the lonely South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha, in charge of the British garrison stationed there to prevent the French from using it as a base while Napoleon was on St. Helena. Many years afterwards, as I shall relate, Barry and Cloete were to meet again.

Barry often accompanied Lord Charles Somerset on tours of the colony, and on one occasion they stayed at the hospitable mansion of George Rex at Knysna. Rex was a character as mysterious as Barry; for he was a son of King George III of England and Hannah Lightfoot, the “fair Quakeress.” There in the Knysna forests were two people who kept their secrets all their lives. They may have been related, but there is no record of their conversation.

WHAT MADE James Barry choose a medical career at a time when women were nurses but never doctors? What influenced her decision to join the army and serve at the Cape? The *Dictionary of National Biography* has this explanation: “The motive of her singular conduct is stated to have been love for an army surgeon.”

This is one of the points on which all previous investigators are agreed, though they offer neither reasons nor proof. With great temerity I suggest that the man was Andrew Smith, later Sir Andrew Smith, K.C.B.

Smith and Barry were both Scots of about the same age, and their medical courses at Edinburgh overlapped. Smith qualified in medicine at the age of eighteen – nothing remarkable in those days of meagre knowledge and swift training – and he, too, was posted to the Cape a few years after Barry's arrival. Both saw service on the Eastern frontier, where the interminable Kaffir campaigns had started. Both returned to England on leave in 1828, though not in the same ship. It is a curious parallel, but if there was a secret Smith and Barry kept it faithfully. Smith married in England at the age of forty-four.

Whether she was in love or not, Barry tried to cultivate the reputation of being a “lady's man.” She was, no doubt, averting suspicion from her sex;

but in one case at least she seems to have pursued a girl out of a mischievous desire to arouse the jealousy of an officer she disliked. Lord Charles Somerset's daughter Georgina is mentioned among her conquests.

When out of uniform she yielded to the feminine love of finery. One outfit she wore at the Cape has been recorded for posterity – “a coat of the latest pea-green Hayne, a satin waistcoat, a vast cravat fastened with many scarf-pins and a pair of tightfitting 'inexpressibles' ” (breeches).

Barry was a snob, and there is an authentic story of a Sunday morning in Cape Town when she entered the Dutch Reformed Church in the Heerengracht in the belief that Lord Charles Somerset was attending the service. When she saw that the Governor's pew was empty she departed hurriedly. But the incident had been noted and the town chuckled over a verse found nailed to a tree:

*With courteous devotion inspired,
Barry came to the temple of prayer,
But quickly turned round and retired
When he found that HIS lord was not there.*

Yet she turned against Somerset, her benefactor, on many occasions, according to the dictates of her conscience or the anger of the moment.

Somerset was an autocrat, one of the most unpopular governors the Cape ever had. He suppressed the newspaper conducted by the poet Pringle and the patriot John Fairbairn; and during this “reign of terror” one of Somerset's opponents was banished while another committed suicide. Doctor James Barry came out strongly in favour of the freedom of the Press, and used all her influence with Somerset, but without avail.

On September 1, 1828, this advertisement appeared in a Cape Town newspaper: “Those friends of Dr. Barry who propose dining together at the George Hotel, previous to his departure from the colony on Monday next, are requested to put down their names.” Thus ended a strange and stormy chapter in her life.

HER NEXT station was Kingston, Jamaica, headquarters of the 3rd West Indian Regiment. She distinguished herself during an outbreak of yellow fever and was mentioned in dispatches and recommended for promotion.

Then came a short and unhappy period on St. Helena. She went there in 1837, telling her friends that the fruit, vegetables and climate of the lonely island suited her. It is clear that until late in life she preferred hot climates.

On the island she had a pretty cottage in Jamestown with a mango tree in the garden. As usual, she was kind to the poor. Her batman was James McCosh of the 91st Regiment, who became jailer in Calvinia, Cape Colony, when he retired. His anecdotes of her queer ways are on record. McCosh said that she lived on bread and vegetables, but drew her pound of meat from the mess every day to feed her dog.

By this time Barry had evidently lost her fondness for duelling. She was challenged by an officer of the garrison after a quarrel in the mess, but declined "in no dignified way."

An officer and guard of soldiers then called at Barry's cottage to demand her sword and place her under arrest. I found a newspaper report of the scene that followed. "His anger can be imagined. He dared anyone to touch, aye, lay a finger on him, so that the grim visages of the guard actually, so far as the rules of the service allowed, tittered at the little woman-man making use of such bombastic words. The upshot was that he refused to give up his sword to anyone but the Governor himself. They were obliged to get horses and ride up to Longwood, Dr. Barry's sword being buckled to his side as impudently as possible."

Barry was tried by general court martial and removed from St. Helena for quarrelsome behaviour. An officer who watched Barry's departure wrote this description: "It was a sultry morning peculiar to the tropics. The steps of the doctor's pony awoke the valley. Barry was in plain clothes, faded and crestfallen, with a veil over the face. The street was deserted, but people gazed through their shutters. No sentry presented arms at the gate leading to the quay."

All was forgiven when Barry reached London. No doubt at her own request, she was posted back to the West Indies; first to Antigua, in 1840 the Barbados, in 1843 to Trinidad. It was during one of her voyages between the islands that she shared a cabin with a young officer named Rogers. After her death Rogers published a three volume novel based on her career, entitled *A Modern Sphinx*. He remained deeply interested in Barry to the end of his life, and was responsible for uncovering some of her secrets.

Rogers said that he occupied the top bunk in the cabin, and at that time he had no suspicion about Barry's sex. "I well remember how, in a harsh and peevish voice, she ordered me out of the cabin – blow high, blow low – while she dressed," added Rogers. The negro servant, the dog Psyche and a goat accompanied her as usual.

On that occasion, according to Rogers, she was on her way to visit her old enemy Cloete, now General Sir Josias Cloete, in command of troops in Barbados. They had become friends after the duel.

In the West Indies, Barry is said to have made a friend promise that she would be sewn up in a blanket and buried in the garments she wore when she died.

When anyone asked her why she had returned to the West Indies she explained that it was due to money troubles in England; alternatively, that her engagement to a young and beautiful creature had been broken off. Barry also said that all her documents, jewels and family papers had been lost on a vessel that had foundered.

The most dramatic event during Barry's years in the West Indies was the first recorded discovery of her sex. In Trinidad in 1844 she went down with fever and was attended while in delirium by Surgeon-General Sir T. Longmore and another doctor. One of them flung aside the bedclothes and remarked: "See, Barry is a woman." Barry recovered consciousness at that moment and asked them in low tones to keep her secret as long as she lived. They agreed.

A Colonel Wilson who knew Barry in Jamaica wrote after her death: “I recollect that she, like most women, loved attending weddings and Christenings. When I was fort-adjutant in Jamaica I used to meet her at dinner at General Ashmores, and we were all much amused at the outrageous stories she used to tell, making herself out quite a lady-killer. Also at balls, or parties of any kind, she was certain to tack herself on to the finest and best-looking woman in the room. She dyed her hair red, but had not a hair on her face and never had.”

Through station after overseas station moved the restless Doctor Barry – Malta in 1847, the Ionian islands (as deputy inspector-general) in 1852; then on to Corfu and the Crimea; and finally, in 1857, to Canada.

There is nothing to account for the posting to Canada, and the ageing, lonely woman must have felt the cold intensely after a lifetime in the tropics. Little is known of this period in Barry's life, though in fairly recent years there were still people in Montreal and Quebec who had personal memories of her. They said she was vain and quarrelsome; but the only vivid picture of her was of her sleigh rides. She had a magnificent sleigh, she wore muskox robes, and her two footmen – irritated by her nagging –

drove her about Montreal much too fast for her peace of mind. To the last she retained her taste for Government House society.

Her overseas service ended in 1864, and she returned to England with Black John, the negro, and the last of the line of dogs named Psyche. These were sad months, for Barry was often ailing. Ladies of the Somerset family remained faithful to her, however, called at her rooms at 14, Margaret Street, London, and took her for drives in the park.

Barry returned from one of these carriage drives in July, 1865, shivering and feverish. Next morning Black John brought the six clean towels she always wrapped herself in, but she remained in bed and spoke to her servant of her life.

“It was not always like this,” Barry told him. “Once I had many friends. I have some still, and those are very good to me. but they are not the friends of early times. They will think of me, though, and if you want help they will remember you for my sake.”

She died on July 26, alone. Black John asked the charwoman to lay out the body, and soon she came running downstairs and revealed the truth. A report was sent to the army authorities at the Horse Guards, and a post-mortem was held. A nobleman's valet called for the dog Psyche. Black

John's fare back to the West Indies was paid. No will was found. No one claimed relationship with the strange, pathetic little doctor. She was buried at Kensal Rise cemetery with this inscription on the gravestone:

Dr. James Barry,
Inspector-General,
H.M. Army Hospitals,
Died 26th July, 1865,
Aged 71 years.

Inspector-General was the highest rank to which an army medical officer could rise in those days. Barry had held that rank for more than six years and Hart's Army List for 1865 placed her at the head of the list in her branch.

DEATH HAD revealed the secret and many newspapers informed the public. There was no cable to South Africa in those days, and it was not until September 9 that *The Cape Argus* announced the news of Barry's death in quaint Victorian style:

“An incident is just now being discussed in military circles so extraordinary that, were its truth not capable of being vouched for by official authority the narration would certainly be deemed absolutely incredible. British officers quartered at the Cape many years ago may remember a certain Dr. Barry attached to the medical staff and enjoying a reputation for considerable skill in his profession, especially for firmness, decision and rapidity in difficult operations. It stands an indubitable fact that a woman was for forty years an officer in the British service, and fought one duel and had sought many more.”

Other Cape Town newspapers copied the paragraphs. A reader then wrote to the Cape Town *Advertiser and Mail* as follows: “Your paragraph in last evening's issue relative to the late Dr. Barry was no secret to many of the inhabitants of this city, as at the time of his, or rather her, residence here it was currently talked of.”

Reminiscences of the doctor were printed in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein, and these I have already drawn upon – especially the anecdotes.

Someone remembered that the Munnik family had a miniature painting of Dr. Barry. In October 1865 a pioneer Cape Town photographer named G. F.

Ashley copied it and supplied a large number of prints to an eager public. *The Cape Argus* commented: "A photograph of this eccentric female has now been published. If the portrait from which the photograph is taken was a likeness of the original, we only wonder the sex of the deceased was not discovered until after her death."

Two years after Barry's death Charles Dickens, then editor of *All the Year Round* magazine, received a manuscript from an officer who had known Barry on St. Helena. This contained many fresh details and Dickens, with his strong sense of the dramatic, published it under the heading of "A Mystery Still."

The candid writer described Barry as "clever; and impudent, and possibly with no certificate of baptism, but socially a gentleman every inch of him." He said that Barry had a fair allowance from some source, but never spoke of relatives or friends. Barry's tastes were too expensive for army pay; they included a horse and a private servant, and a diet of asparagus, peaches and grapes.

"Some called him a toady," went on the writer. "His testiness was harmless, however, and he made friends and kept them. Frail in body and eccentric in manner, he ensured respect by his capacity. He defied the rules

of the service with impunity. Once he returned to England without leave and told the angry Director-General of the Medical Department in London: 'Well, I have come home to have my hair cut.'"

This writer asserted that on retirement Barry had expected to be knighted, and had ordered the uniform. Finally he declared that the post-mortem not only revealed that she was a woman, but also that she had been a mother. Many others repeated this story until it became a legend.

Lord Albemarle's book, from which I have quoted, came out ten years later, while the novel by Major E. Rogers was published in 1881. It was not until 1895, however, that some of the essential facts emerged, shorn of hearsay and fiction. Sheer chance, I imagine, was responsible.

In 1895 a surgeon named Bright in the United States Navy wrote from the naval hospital at Washington, D.C., to the British medical periodical, the *Lancet*, referring to the tradition of a British medical officer who reached high rank and was found to be a female. "Will you please inform me," asked Bright, "whether this story rests upon any credible foundation or is the mere figment of an idle imagination?"

That opened the doors to a remarkable series of letters. Among others it brought to light Rogers, who declared that he had consulted Barry's record

at the British War Office. There he had found all the details of her overseas service, and the result of the post-mortem. Rogers vouched for the fact that Barry was a woman, but it is significant that he did not mention that she had been a mother. He would certainly have done so if this detail had appeared in the post-mortem report.

Rogers wrote: “She was sympathetic and skilful in her profession – yet what a life of repressed emotions must hers have been.”

He added that he had visited her grave and found it neglected, and appealed to the Army Department to rescue it from oblivion. One final point he made was that Sir William Mackinnon, Director-General of the Army Medical Department, had assured him that Barry was the Earl of Buchan's daughter.

Other correspondents testified that it was a “matter of common repute” that Barry was a woman.

General W. Chamberlayne, who had known Barry in Jamaica, said in his letter that her manner and speech were assumed to repel inquisitive associates. He went on: “When I think of the anxiety, care and trouble she must have experienced for years to keep up the assumed character – possibly first undertaken for the love of some man and then retained for the sake of his character as well as her own – it seems surprising that she could have possessed so many

good points. It must have been a life of great misery, continually acting a part so repellent to her better feelings. “

At the same period as the *Lancet* correspondence, Dr. J. H. (later Sir) Meiring Beck gave a lecture on Barry before the Cape Town branch of the British Medical Association. He had gathered his material from people who had known Barry, and I have drawn on this valuable lecture in checking and presenting the facts.

Surgeon-Major Hamilton, who was present at the lecture, confirmed the story unfolded by Dr. Beck. “I am the only person in this room who ever saw Barry,” remarked Hamilton “I met her in Jamaica in 1861. She was then a curiously withered-up creature with no hair on her face at all. At that time there was no suspicion as to Dr. Barry's sex.”

Mark Twain, visiting Cape Town in 1896, heard the Barry story and seized on it avidly. In *More Tramps Abroad* he unwittingly gave a distorted version. He said that Barry had disgraced herself with her people, so she changed her name and sex to make a new start in the world.

The play by Olga Racster and Jessica Grove was staged in London thirty years ago, with Sybil Thorndike as Barry. Not long afterwards an amateur cast produced the play in Cape Town, and held their rehearsals at the old wine farm of Alphen, scene of the duel between Barry and Cloete.

An investigator called at the British War Office in 1919 to consult Barry's personal file. Officials remembering seeing it there shortly before that time; but a long search revealed that it had been stolen. How fortunate that Rogers, novelist though he was, had access to the file before this crime against history had been committed. Rogers at least was able to set out the important facts in the *Lancet* correspondence.

Barry's memory lingers in the folklore of Cape Town, and her ghost is supposed to roam the mountain slopes above Camp's Bay, where Lord Charles Somerset had his shooting-box. Coloured nursemaids still tell the children: "Old Doctor Barry's ghost will catch you if you stay out late."

I prefer to remember Doctor James Barry as the champion of the lepers and the ill-treated prisoners – the brave woman, kind at heart, who found Jacob Elliott with his thigh fractured but "without a single comfort," and eased his pain.

CHAPTER 15

WHAT MANNER OF MEN

“SHOW me a people's monuments and I will tell you what manner of men they are,” wrote Douglas Southall Freeman. It is said that while Cape Town has too much statuary, national heroes have been ignored. Nevertheless, Cape Town made no mistake when it decided to build a memorial to Archdeacon Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot. No finer character ever worked among the poor of the city.

Do you know the Lightfoot memorial? It is the fountain in the alley called Trafalgar Place between Adderley Street and Parliament Street, between the bazaar and the bank.

Lightfoot spent nearly half a century at the beck and call of Cape Town's coloured people. He worked among them during seven severe epidemics – smallpox, measles, low fever, typhus, smallpox again, influenza and finally bubonic plague. Today, nearly half a century after his death, I am sure many of the flower-sellers think of him when they fill their baths at the Lightfoot memorial.

They nicknamed Lightfoot the “South-Easter,” for in his younger days he was swift and vigorous as the wind. The southeaster played a grim part in his life, however, as I shall show.

Lightfoot was a printer, and later a journalist in Nottingham, England, until he heard a sermon by Bishop Gray. This inspired him to train for the church, and turned his thoughts towards South Africa. He was ordained a deacon in 1857 and arrived in Cape Town the following year, at the age of twenty-seven.

It was an unpaved and undeveloped Cape Town he saw. “Clouds of red, gritty dust are overwhelming,” wrote Lightfoot in his diary. “Gentleman go about with veils over their faces.”

When priest's orders had been conferred on him, Lightfoot took charge of St. Paul's, Bree Street, and also started mission work among the Malays. His parish was not clearly defined; it was “Cape Town and the neighbourhood.” Among his congregation were slaves recently freed in East Africa, negroes from West Africa, Hottentots and all the coloured and South African native types to be found in that wide area. Before long Lightfoot was conducting services in High Dutch, and he translated parts of the Prayer-book into that language. He also learnt Xosa.

When the smallpox broke out among convicts waiting to start work on the Table Bay breakwater, Lightfoot visited them in spite of the efforts of Dr. Bickersteth of the Somerset Hospital to dissuade him.

Dean Douglas wrote to Bishop Gray: “Lightfoot gets on very well. We could not have had a better man. His sermons are very good, but his delivery is bad. I keep telling him that his great aim must be the Mohametans.”

Smallpox was most virulent among the Malays, and at least a thousand died. Lightfoot entered their homes fearlessly and urged vaccination. No cellar in the slums was too remote for Lightfoot to find when visiting the sick. Between the epidemics he started an adult school for mechanics, helped the sailors who survived the shipwrecks during the great gale of 1865 in Table Bay, and served on the Sailors' Home Committee.

Lightfoot went much further than that. Again and again he spent every spare penny of his own tiny salary of £200 a year on helping the poor. He denied himself new clothing until he was almost in rags. When friends saw his need and subscribed money for his personal use he gave it away immediately to people of all creeds who were in distress.

During one period of depression in 1866, Lightfoot set up a night refuge in a Riebeeck Street timber store. Every man who came there received bread and a blanket. Thus it was not long before “South-Easter” also became

known as the most generous man in Cape Town. No wonder the poor almost worshipped him.

Lightfoot married a cousin, Ellen Fothergill. In 1870, as Canon Lightfoot, he was able to take his wife to England. Friends had subscribed £200 for the holiday. Crowds of coloured parishioners sang farewell hymns on the quay. His return was marred soon afterwards by the death of his elder son, aged ten, who was drowned in a pond on the Signal Hill slopes. Then his wife went to England to recuperate and died on the voyage. Cape Town grieved with him.

Smallpox came again in 1881, and many fled to the country to escape the scourge. Lightfoot, of course, remained in the thick of it, fearless as ever. It was at this period that Rentzke's Farm was first used as an isolation hospital; and Lightfoot, the comforter with the charmed life, was often to be found among the patients. After this epidemic the Mayor of Cape Town presented Lightfoot with a testimonial purse of £258. You can imagine easily enough how gladly he received the money – and how quickly he distributed it among his poor.

Lightfoot had married again, a teacher at St. Cyprians. He was appointed Archdeacon of the Cape in 1885, but after that he refused further promotion.

“More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise,” was his guiding principle. He served on every charitable committee and as a member of the New Somerset Hospital board of managers. (A ward there bears his name.) A trustee of the South African Public Library, he also edited a church newspaper.

Age was telling on him when the bubonic plague visited Cape Town in 1901, but still this tall, bent clergyman with the white mutton-chop whiskers carried his bag on a stick over his shoulder and went on his rounds. To him, every man was a brother. But his health was failing. He was seventy-three on a late October day in 1903 when he posted some letters at the General Post Office on his way to take the funeral train to Maitland. A furious south-easter blew the tottering old man off his feet. Although his face and hands were cut he refused to go home. Giddy, faint, and in pain, he went to the railway station to carry out his duties. On the train, fortunately, he met another clergyman who offered to take the funeral; but Lightfoot went to the graveside to console the relatives.

He was breaking up, and worried about money; for in his generous way he had made himself responsible for a heavy debt. Friends handed him the amount as soon as they heard of it. Then came another blow. The Church School in Bree Street was damaged by fire, and Lightfoot was more disturbed than he would have been if he had lost his own home. That was in October 1904, and the following

month Lightfoot lay dying in the Bree Street rectory. In another room his wife was seriously ill. Many called, among them a Jewish rabbi and a Moslem priest. Outside the house hundreds of sad-faced Malays kept watch.

When the passing of Archdeacon Lightfoot was announced on November 12, the bell of St. George's Cathedral tolled for an hour and all Cape Town went into genuine mourning for this humble man. Four thousand people filed past the coffin in St. Paul's.

“All the poor and unknown came in endless procession, twenty coloured to one white,” wrote a friend. “Once a poor black woman passing the coffin made the Sign of the Cross. He was mourned as few of the mighty have been mourned. His house was the resort of the sad and lonely of all classes. He has left a living picture of himself in the minds of multitudes.”

Cape Town had not seen such a funeral procession since the body of Cecil Rhodes passed through the streets. The newspapers all reported the mingling of Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Dutch Reformed Church ministers, Jews, Malays. Three special trains were needed to carry the people to the cemetery, and thousands surrounded the grave.

One newspaper recalled a verse Lightfoot had written in an album:

*An arm of aid to the weak,
A friendly hand to the friendless,
Kind words so short to speak,
But whose echo is endless.*

Lightfoot, the “South-Easter,” had never recovered from his fall in the wind. The memorial was unveiled three years after his death. A month later the merciless south-easter came again and overturned the fountain, just as it had flung down Archdeacon Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot..

CAPE TOWN'S first public monument was the obelisk at Claremont in memory of Sir John Herschel, the astronomer who discovered 1,202 double stars and added greatly to the knowledge of the heavens during his four years work in the Peninsula. He also helped the cause of education. The obelisk has stood, since 1841, on the site of Herschel's telescope.

There was a movement to set up an equestrian statue to Sir Harry Smith on the Parade seven years later; but the anti-convict agitation put an end to the scheme and the people of Cape Town diverted their efforts to preventing food from reaching the Governor's table.

At the end of last century Cape Town had only three public statues – Sir George Grey in front of the library (1865), Queen Victoria in the grounds of Parliament (1890) and the bronze statue of Van Riebeeck (1899). Van Riebeeck has stood up to the test of time better than the others. The Grey statue, indeed, has been described as “a benevolent insipidity typical of its period,” while Queen Victoria's statue is now looked upon by some as “a depressing example of misguided patriotism.”

Cecil Rhodes commissioned the Van Riebeeck statue, of course, and John Tweed, a Scot, was the sculptor. The original site was closer to Monument station than the present one. Baker the architect (later Sir Herbert Baker) represented Rhodes at the unveiling on a fine May day in 1899, and handed over the statue as a gift to Mr. T. Ball, Mayor of Cape Town. Railway traffic made it impossible for anyone to hear the speeches, but a cheer went up as the wrappings fell away from the portly figure of Van Riebeeck.

Not many will remember that a bronze replica of Van Riebeeck's ship, the *Dromedaris*, once rode proudly near the statue. It formed a weather vane on the Pier pavilion, and this handsome model is now housed in the City Hall.

A tiny memorial which Cape Town missed when it was damaged by a vandal was the stone ship (or argosy) in honour of Scott of the Antarctic. Designed by J. M.

Solomon, and carved from a single block of Bland's river stone by Benjamin Smith, it stood within railings opposite the Van Riebeeck statue. John X Merriman unveiled the Scott Memorial in 1916. "It is fitting that the monument should stand facing Van Riebeeck," declared Merriman. "Although Van Riebeeck could not lay claim to the great endurance of Scott, he was a plucky, hard-working man and he represented his country at a time when Holland held the record for Furthest South."

Scott joined his ship at Simonstown, and raised some of the money for his last expedition in Cape Town. He visited Merriman at Stellenbosch, and Merriman asked him about the hardships of the Antarctic. "Oh, you feel so healthy down there that you forget about hardships," was Scott's reply.

Cape Town's least-known memorial is the "peace plaque" which remained embedded in the Adderley Street cobblestones for 30 years. Millions walked over it without being aware of this fragment of recent history. It had its origin in the midday pause, first observed in Cape Town during World War I at the suggestion of Bishop Furse of Pretoria and the late Mr. R. R. Brydone. No other city in the world had considered stopping its traffic every day for two minutes prayer. But the tide was turning against the Allies in France, and many were thinking of the heavy casualties on the battlefields.

The first pause, on June 1, 1918, lasted five minutes, and thousands assembled at the intersection of Adderley, Darling and Shortmarket Streets. There the two minutes pause was observed until Armistice Day, 1918; and the following year the familiar scene was revived when the peace treaty was signed. Doves were set free, and one of the speakers announced the decision to engrave a memorial plaque.

So after that ceremony the plaque was cemented into the cobbles, bearing the words: "Here Cape Town Celebrated Peace, 2 Aug. 1919." Worn by many feet, the plaque was taken up in 1949, before the words disappeared, and mounted on an electric standard near the spot where it had rested through the years of peace and World War II.

Oddest of Cape Town's unofficial statues, and often overlooked like the "peace plaque," are the figures of human beings and animals on roofs and facades of buildings. You can find Britannia and Spes Bona and many other feminine effigies in this stone and metal world above the eye-line. Lions, unicorns, eagles, griffins, ostriches, dragons and even sea-snakes are represented. Fierce dogs with bared teeth, naked children, horses and bunches of grapes have all been carved by eager sculptors for a public that passes by and gazes into shop-windows.

Churches and churchyards have their monuments, of course, many of them of real historic value. Family vaults, however, have been disappearing in recent years. The Le Sueur vault at Sea Point, close to the Alabama-bos where the Malays held their annual picnics, vanished not long ago. Up in the Gardens the Hofmeyr vault was demolished twenty years ago, when the Volks Hospitaal was built; but the Hofmeyr private cemetery survives. So does the Van Breda cemetery in Oranjezicht.

Much statuary vanished when the Somerset Road cemeteries were built over about thirty years ago, though some of the coffins and tombstones were transferred to Woltemade. At that period the old town cemeteries had become the resort of vagrants and criminals. Fairbairn the journalist and Andrew Barnard (Lady Anne's husband), were among those buried in the old cemetery.

The finest piece of statuary, judged by any standards, in the cemetery was the Chantrey marble. Chantrey paintings are famous, a Chantrey sculpture is rare. When Diana Warden, wife of a high Bombay official, died in Cape Town in 1816, her husband commissioned Sir Francis Chantrey to design the exquisitely simple block of marble for her grave. It has a delicate medallion profile of Diana Warden at one end, while the whole block is

encircled with a floral cordon of inimitable craftsmanship. This priceless work of art was discovered under a heap of rubbish in the Somerset Road cemetery in 1907, and set up and restored at Woltemade No. 1 (Block D, United Allotment).

As a rule, I am not inspired by statuary of any sort. I remember travelling up the inside of New York's Statue of Liberty in an elevator years ago and wondering whether such a journey was really necessary. At the base of the statue, however, I read the verse by Emma Lazarus, and it lingered in my mind:

*Give me your tired; your Poor,
Your huddled masses,
yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore;
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed to me;
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

I hope that something as memorable as those words will appear on Cape Town's new statues.

CHAPTER 16

MEN BEHIND THE MUSEUM

FOR more than a century the people of Cape Town have been able to settle some of their arguments about animals (and other oddities) by visiting the South African Museum in its various abodes. While its main purpose is to teach natural history, you may also discover the value of a coin or identify a mineral. Life as a member of the museum staff is a never-ending quiz programme.

Cape Town first became aware of the fascination of a museum as far back as 1707. One of the earliest books in English dealing with the Cape described the show: “The wild beasts of this country are Lyons, Leopards, Tyger cats, wild asses and several kinds of Deer, the skins of which may be seen for a Skilling in the Company's House at the Great Garden, well-stuffed and placed to such advantage they may be mistaken for live ones.”

The men behind a museum, however, give life to the collection – and Cape Town has been fortunate in its naturalists. It seems that a Mr. C. M. Villet started the movement for a museum in Cape Town early last century. Mr. Villet, as I have mentioned before, had a menagerie at Green Point and an animal and curio shop in Long Street, so that he knew what he was talking

about. Meetings were held, and in 1825 the army doctor Andrew Smith was appointed as honorary director.

Those were great days for the field collector. Anyone could find new species, and Dr. Smith gave his name to scores of birds, reptiles and fish. Above all he was a snake specialist. He brought the first preserved python to Cape Town. Dr. Smith's collection was housed in the Old Commercial Exchange on the Parade. During his years at the Cape he organized many expeditions, and appealed through the *Cape Town Gazette* for additional specimens.

He was anxious to clear up the mystery of the “Das-adder” – a fabulous monster with the head of a dassie and the body of a snake. It is unlikely that Dr. Smith accepted the story, but he may have hoped to find something new in snakes. There was no response to his advertisement. Nevertheless, the “das-adder” legend persists in the Cape, and some people in the country cannot be shaken in their belief.

Dr. Smith returned to England and was knighted; but the South African Museum fell into decay. Not until 1855 was it revived by Sir George Grey, with Mr. Edgar Layard as curator. Layard found the specimens in the Old Slave Lodge, above the present site, and moved the museum into two rooms above Brittain's bookshop in

St. George's Street. He was a bird enthusiast; his *Birds of South Africa* is prized by book collectors.

Layard helped to persuade the government to build the South African Public Library; and for many years the museum shared the library building. Taxidermy was not always beyond reproach in those days. One visitor complained that he was so overcome by the odour that he had to go out and take brandy.

After Layard, in 1876, came a butterfly specialist, Mr. Roland Trimen. He was succeeded by Mr. W. L. Sclater, another bird man, who moved the museum from the library in 1897 to the present building at the top of Queen Victoria Street. Dr. Louis Albert Peringuey, a French lecturer at the Diocesan College and S.A.C.S., became curator of the museum early this century. Versatile and enterprising, he was always eager to send expeditions to secure unusual specimens – anything valuable from a blue whale to a huge meteorite. There are meteorites worth thousands of pounds in the South African Museum. The collection is unique, one of the finest in the world.

Dr. Peringuey employed that most famous of all the old hunters, F. C. Selous, to collect antelopes for the museum. The interests of Dr. Peringuey ranged from Bushman paintings to trout, from Portuguese monuments to beetles. He was born in Bordeaux, finest wine district in the world; and when the devastating phylloxera

attacked the Western Province vineyards he used all his scientific skill to help in the campaign against the disease.

The third authority on birds to take charge of the museum arrived in 1924 – Dr. Leonard Gill, a Scot who started skinning birds when he was ten years old. Although he retired in 1942 Dr. Gill is still giving his services to the museum, in the bird section. Thousands have studied his *First Guide to South Africana Birds*, a book which took him seven years to write, dealing as it does with more than seven hundred birds.

Dr. Keppel Barnard, the present director, prefers fish. He, too, has written a popular guide to the subject of his choice. Strange to say, Barnard first qualified as a barrister, and became a Doctor of Science long afterwards. Apart from fish and whales, he has a strong archaeological bent; and he is one of the most experienced mountaineers in South Africa.

I went behind the scenes at the museum with Dr. Barnard and saw the natural history library, one of the finest in the southern hemisphere. Without these books, any South African natural science research worker would soon be baffled. But you need credentials to gain admission. Years ago a visitor cut all the colour plates from a rare volume. Detected at last, he committed suicide.

Behind the scenes are the diamonds and the most valuable coins. The museum has been burgled on several occasions; so now a little “minting” of money goes on behind the scenes; the sets of coins displayed appear to be complete ... but all that glitters is not gold.

Every member of the museum staff is a keen collector, and the coloured cleaners have brought in useful specimens. Between the Avenue and Queen Victoria Street runs a storm water drain. For some reason finds are often made when this drain is cleaned after the winter rains. The museum cleaners go down through the manholes and drag buckets through the mud. They return with rings, medals and coins.

The museum has had its benefactors, and among them was a Malay merchant named Hadji Sullaiman Shahmohamed. He gave a fine collection of Greek, Roman and other coins to the museum, and £100 for investment, so that more coins could be purchased with the interest. “It is possible for a coloured man to take a deep interest in matters of ancient history,” wrote the Hadji. “I hope that my example, though very meagre, may be followed by other and more wealthy people.”

Dr. Barnard remarked that the wealthy citizens of Cape Town had not been conspicuous by their gifts of collections or money. In 1949, however, he

received an anonymous gift of £1,000, and this amount is being used to improve the mammal and bird collections. Some of the mammals are sorely in need of improvement. One venerable giraffe, for example, was mounted in 1860 and is now showing signs of disintegration. It is housed in the whale section, owing to lack of space elsewhere. There is also an ancient elephant which has at least defied the moths.

Skins of Addo elephants, shot by the late Major P. J. Pretorius, are stored behind the scenes at the museum. It is impossible to mount an elephant effectively in South Africa; the tools are not available. A giraffe, the work of Mr. Drury, was the largest taxidermy job ever carried out in Cape Town.

If fire broke out in the museum, top priority would be given to the rescue of the quagga foal. No other museum in the Union has a complete mounted specimen of this animal, which became extinct before the end of last century. The quagga had broad stripes confined to the head, neck and barrel. It was the fiercest of the zebra tribe, and the fastest. Not many, I suppose, remember its call – “Qua-ha-ha!” – which gave it the name quagga.

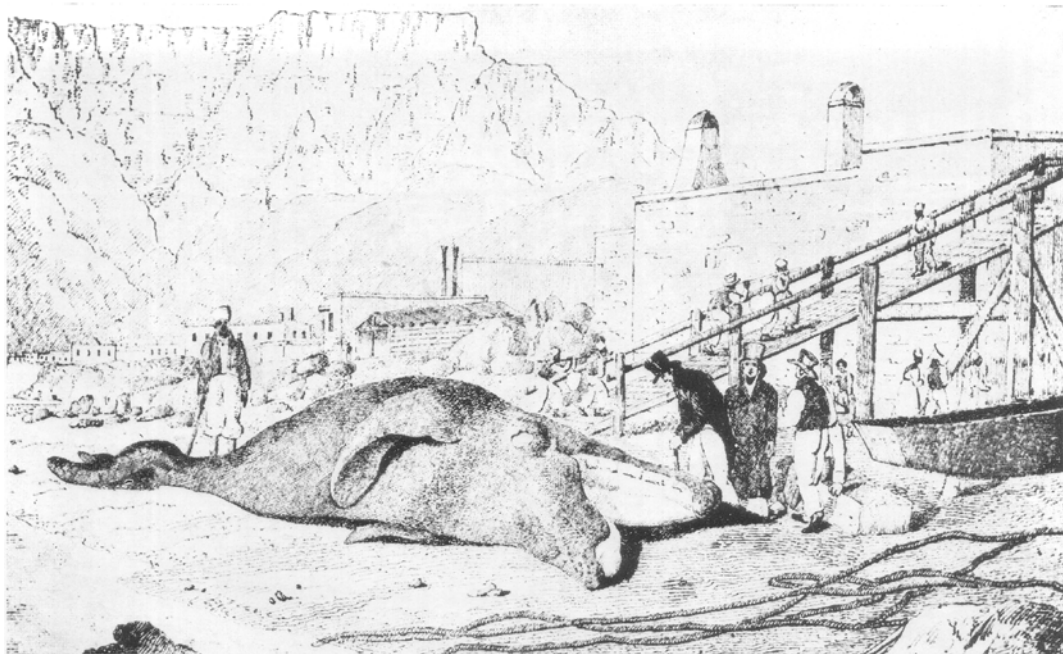
This light-brown foal in the South African Museum was shot near Beaufort West in 1860. Another museum has a skull, but you have to go overseas to find other mounted specimens. Its value can hardly be estimated. The giraffe

mounted by Mr. Drury cost the museum £100, and the exhibits are insured for £43,000. Nearly all the mammals and birds could be replaced. The meteorites would survive any fire. But this little quagga, with its silky hide, is the pride of the staff, and the museum would not be the same place without it.

Another exhibit which even the British Museum authorities must envy is the collection of whales. All the whales found in South African waters are there – including, a seventy-five-foot blue whale skeleton; a rare pygmy whale, and skulls of the beaked whale, rarest of all. The lower jaws of the blue whale in this section are probably the largest ever recorded.

You can see a model of an old sailing whaler in this gallery, and actual harpoons of all types. Seals and sea elephants fill a corner next to the giraffe. The gallery was closed for eight years, until an attendant could be engaged to protect the whales from the public. Before the war visitors extracted whales teeth and signed their names on the skeletons.

Dr. Barnard and his staff are painstaking scientists, and they emerge with credit from the daily quiz. But they do wish they were not called upon to examine so many old books, especially family Bibles. Books are outside their sphere. You can take anything else to them, from a dinosaur to a frog, and the chances are that the South African Museum will know something about it.



Within living memory, whales were hunted in Table Bay. Charles D'Oyly sketched this whale calf, 20 feet long, which had been cut out of the mother.

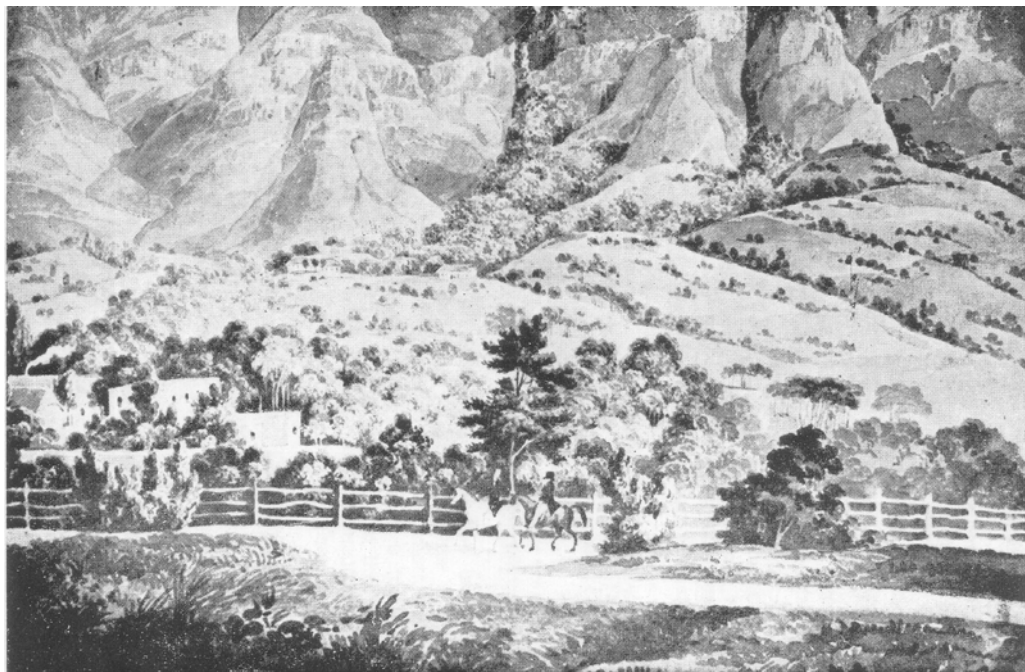
CHAPTER 17

WILD LIFE PAST AND PRESENT

THE retreat of the lion from the Cape Peninsula forms a dramatic episode. Lions roamed the shores of Table Bay when the first settlers landed, and Van Riebeeck met one in his garden. He recorded that the one night the roaring of lions was so ominous that it seemed they were about to storm the mud fort.

Anyone killing a lion between Wynberg and Lion's Head in those early years received seventy-five florins. The reward was reduced to fifty florins when the boundaries of the colony were extended and lion hunting became easier. Lions were not driven out of the Cape Peninsula until the last years of the seventeenth century. They destroyed “eight beautiful sheep” in Tamboers Kloof; frightened the watch keepers at Salt River; and as late as 1694 they killed nine cows within sight of the Castle. This last raid caused the authorities to increase the reward to the equivalent of £5, a sum which had more purchasing power at that time. In those flintlock days, however, an encounter with a lion was a dangerous adventure.

Early lion hunters had to bring the whole lion carcass to the Castle. It was no use whisking a mere tail in front of an official of the Dutch East India



Horsemen on the upper road to Wynberg, near Kirstenbosch.

Company. Later on, however, rewards were paid on the evidence of skins. The Burgher Council financed all its activities by levying a single tax known as “Lion and Tyger money”. Rewards were paid out of this fund, and for a period there was enough over for roads and bridges.

The lions had retreated to the kloofs of the Stellenbosch, Hottentots Holland and other mountains. They carried off an armed sentry at a Berg River post in 1701. Travellers had to be constantly on guard against lions almost throughout the eighteenth century. In the settled Cape districts, however, lions had become so scarce by 1772 that the system of rewards for lion skins was stopped. Anyone who brought a lion to Cape Town alive was paid for it – and no doubt he deserved the money.

Paterson and Gordon, travelling to Swellendam in 1777, mentioned the shooting of a lion at Houw Hoek. Years after that date lions were seen in the Cedarberg mountains and near Caledon. On the other hand Truter's expedition of 1801 did not encounter lion spoor until reaching the present Beaufort West area. And a decade later Burchell saw his first lion after passing the spot where Carnarvon now stands.

Thunberg, the botanist, had a word of advice for travellers menaced by lions. Several lions passed his wagons, and near the Sundays River he spent a night

listening to the howling of wolves and roaring of lions. “On meeting a lion,” suggested Thunberg, “one ought never to run away, but stand still, pluck up courage, and look it stern in the face. If the lion lies still without wagging its tail there is no danger, but if it makes any motion with its tail then it is hungry and you are in great danger.”

Sparrman, a later traveller in the Cape lion country, said that his party cracked their long ox-whips loudly to scare the lions away. Some of the lion packs found comparative sanctuaries where they lingered for years, cut off from the rest of their kind. There were the Uitenhage lions, for example, last heard of in 1845 in the Sundays River bush. Scully, the author, declared that the last lion on record killed south of the Orange River was an old stray roaming the Tsomo Valley, near Queenstown, in 1865; but there may have been later survivals in the wild country along the lower Orange River.

What happened to the heads, skins and skulls of all these Cape lions? Such relics are usually preserved as heirlooms in farmhouses; but the Cape lion has vanished from the Cape almost without trace. Zoologists deplore this disappearance because the extinct Cape lion seems to have been a sub-species, larger than the northern lion and with a black mane. The yellow-maned lion was also at home in the Cape,

though it is typical of the desert. Probably there was interbreeding between northern and southern lions while they shared the same hunting grounds.

Measurements of a lion shot at Willowmore long ago confirm the impression of the larger size of the extinct lion. There is also a fine, mounted specimen in a London club; and here the wholly black mane is seen. Hairy shoulders and large black elbow and tail tufts are believed to have been characteristic of the southern lion.

Colonel J. Stevenson-Hamilton examined this London club specimen, supposed to have been shot near Colesberg in 1836. He had seen drawings of the Cape lion in the books of Gordon Cumming, and here was proof of the artist's accuracy. The skull was shorter between the eyes and nose, giving the Cape lion a bulldog look. The club specimen is the only one. No museum has anything more than a fossilised skull.

So the Cape lion has gone, leaving many a place-name in memory of its passing. Only along the hot Kalahari frontiers of the Cape will you find yellow-maned lions still preying on the farmers' herds. And you will probably have to put out many a dead donkey as bait before you find one of those lions over the sights of your rifle.

WILD LIFE survives in the Cape Peninsula, though the larger mammals are to be found only in the more remote parts of the Table Mountain range.

Porcupines were so plentiful on the Lion's Head slopes last century that hunts were organized. First the holes were located and blocked, and a man with a spear was posted at each burrow. Dogs put up the porcupines, which raced for their burrows and were speared on arrival. The white flesh of the porcupine tastes like pork. Quills were used as penholders and hatpins. The porcupines are still there, but nowadays they are so shy that the quills are usually the only signs of them.

Trapping of game on the mountain slopes was discussed by a special meeting of the Divisional Council in 1910. There were still herds of vaal ribbok and klipspringer on the Twelve Apostles, while duikers and steenbok were reported to have damaged vineyards on the Wynberg side.

Vaal ribbok are still abundant in the wild, southern mountains of the Cape Peninsula. This is the only antelope confined to the mountains south of the Tropic of Capricorn, and it has survived because of its remote habitat, and also because it is not considered as palatable as other buck. Early settlers who saw these animals on Table Mountain thought they were similar to the

roebuck of Europe – hence the name. In fact, they are very different, with woolly, grey-brown hair and legs like a gazelle.

Another mountain antelope, which unfortunately has dwindled to the point of extinction in the Cape Peninsula, is the klipspringer. This dainty creature is reminiscent of the chamois. It has a thick, bristly coat and blunt hoofs. Among the crags it usually escapes pursuit, but on level ground the dogs have the advantage.

A grysbok formed the habit of visiting one of the more secluded gardens above Clifton a few years ago. It called regularly in search of geranium leaves, and finally became so tame that members of the family could pat it. In the wattle thickets of the Glencairn Valley you find the vaal ribbok and grysbok. They are preyed upon by packs of domestic dogs which have run wild and formed queer cross-breeds. Dogs and buck use tunnels in the almost impenetrable wattle. If you are looking for adventure, explore these tunnels and you may come face to face with wild life – and it may take the shape of a silver jackal.

Game poachers are active in the mountains of the South Peninsula. Climbers often hear the sound of shot-guns; but the hunters are quick to hide.

It is safe to say that not a single leopard could be found in the Cape Peninsula nowadays, though spoor and other signs were reported shortly before World War II. This evidence, however, could easily have been provided by a lynx. The last Table Mountain leopard appears to have been shot in 1914 in the Constantia area. Last century there were a number of leopards, and *The Gape Argus* in April, 1857, described a hunt above Camps Bay. A farmer named Goslin woke up one night to find his cattle gathered in panic round the house. He went out at dawn and discovered that a bull had been driven over a precipice. The body had been mauled, and not far away three calves were lying dead.

Goslin had a mastiff, which intercepted the leopard and fought it. The mastiff was killed. Soon afterwards the leopard and a cub were seen in the bush near the Stinkwater stream. All the carcasses were baited with strychnine. Next day Goslin found only the bones of the animals, but the leopard was never traced. It must have^e taken a fatal dose of poison.

Smaller members of the cat family still inhabiting Table Mountain are wild cats, serval cats and genets. Rooikat ravine on the mountain was named after the lynx, a formidable marauder with amber eyes which looks something like a large and ferocious Siamese cat. A lynx will pull down a buck with ease. It is doubtful whether the lynx survives in the Cape Peninsula, though they are not far away.

Genets live mainly on lizards, insects and mice; but they raid Tamboers Kloof and other suburbs at intervals and have been found inside houses. Fowls, pigeons and domestic cats are doomed when they cross the path of a genet. Unhappy is the householder who corners a genet, for then the scent glands come into play.

A baboon census of the Cape Peninsula might reveal as many as 600 in all the scattered troops. This is one of the few areas in South Africa where baboons are protected; though even without the law on his side, the intelligent baboon would probably have survived in fair numbers. Van Riebeeck's men were often so hungry that they ate the Table Mountain baboons. Peter Kolben also had something to say about them: "The head of a baboon is something like that of a dog but his features are very ugly and frightful. Some Hottentots are of opinion that these baboons can speak, but that they avoid it for fear men should lug 'em by the heels and make 'em work for a living."

Dr. Walter Rose, the naturalist and author, knows the wild life of the Peninsula intimately, especially the frogs and toads. His favourite area, he once told me, is the lonely plateau above Muizenberg. More than twenty varieties of snakes are found in the Peninsula, but Dr. Rose declares that fatalities are so rare that even the yellow cobra and ringhals cannot be regarded as a serious menace. Cobras are plentiful; a collector from the United States caught four hundred during a short

visit not long ago. The rarities are the horned adder and the black-banded coral snake.

Dr. Rose has identified nineteen different lizards in the Peninsula, all harmless. There are five hundred species of spiders – more than in the whole British Isles – and four scorpions. “I have been stung twice by scorpions, and once a baviaan spider got me under the fingernail and set my arm on fire for a couple of hours,” recalled Dr. Rose. “My pet lemur bit my right ear one day. Otherwise my life as a naturalist has been free from accidents. But I never play the fool with snakes.”

Bats come right into Cape Town, fruit bats and insect-eaters, fluttering among the Avenue oaks. But a rare animal indeed is the spiny mouse. It was recorded in the Cape Peninsula seventy years ago and was supposed to have become extinct. Some time ago, however, Dr. Rose found it on the Devil's Peak summit. The aardvark or ant-bear may have departed from the Cape Peninsula, though they were once fairly common on the Cape Flats. This grotesque freak, often weighing 150 lb. has powerful nails and a tail as hard as rhino hide. Prowling by night, they are seldom trapped or shot. Museums are always anxious to secure specimens, but complete skeletons are hard to find. Similarly it is a long time since a ratel, or honey badger, was seen in the Peninsula. The mountains above Tokai were their

habitat at one time. A ratel is a vicious opponent, often more than a match for a pack of dogs.

When you come to the birds you can count more than two hundred species. Even the black eagle has been observed nesting on Table Mountain. Butterflies (like spiders) are found in greater variety in the Peninsula than in the whole British Isles – more than fifty permanent species and about twenty visitors. Some of their names are as beautiful as their colours; Mountain Glory and Autumn Brown. They fall easy victims to mountain fires.

You can catch rainbow trout in the Liesbeek, and turtles of several species have crawled up Cape Peninsula beaches. Though the black rhinoceros no longer roams on Table Mountain, wild life is still there for those who know where to seek it.

CHAPTER 18

CITY OF LAUGHTER

*To kill dull Time, to lighten household cares,
To dry the widow and the orphan's tears,
In such a cause, who would not then engage
To tread the boards, since "all the world's a stage."*

SUCH was the prologue to one of Cape Town's earliest plays. The town was almost half as old as it is today before the first theatre opened. There was music and dancing in the taverns, but those who yearned for more intellectual entertainment had to wait a long time for it.

"There are no public entertainments," wrote Captain Cook after his visit to Cape Town in 1771. Far back in the Archives there is a mention of a bullfight at the Castle, but there were no toreadors. The bull was baited by dogs, and "everyone was well treated by Governor van Assenburgh."

Late in the eighteenth century came the merry French soldiers to reinforce the Cape garrison. They built a stage in a barrack room. *The Barber of Seville* was the first play, and it caused as much excited talk as did the first broadcasting in our own time.

It was left to British officers and others, however, to start the movement for Cape Town's first theatre. It was finished in September 1801 – the massive, solitary building with tapering buttresses in Hottentot's Square (now Riebeeck Square). Old Malays still call it the *Komediehuis*. It was first named the Yonge Theatre, then the Riebeeck and finally the African Theatre. Twelve performances, in Dutch and English alternately, were given during the first season; and a company of German amateurs were also prominent during those early days.

Nearly forty years passed, and the *South African Christian Recorder* attacked the wicked theatre so successfully that it was sold and converted into a church and school of freed slaves. During a meeting there, a few disgusted ex-slave owners stoned the building and broke the windows. Only then was the church named St. Stephen's, after the first Christian martyr who was stoned for his faith.

The building has often been described as “the old slave market”. Leibbrandt, the archivist, investigated the legend early this century, and found no evidence to show that slaves had been sold there, or that any building in Cape Town had ever been devoted to that purpose. Riebeeck Square was an open-air slave market, however, and slaves may have been kept in the quaint basement cells.

St. Stephen's Church is a memorial of the First British Occupation, the only public building of that period still surviving. It would be difficult to find another church which was once a theatre anywhere in the world.

Cape Town's second theatre was a store in Harrington Street, where Dutch plays were produced once a fortnight between 1808 and 1822. Wine cellars were used by other theatrical companies.

Lovers of the drama did not have to mourn the closing of the African Theatre for long. There was a gorgeous wine cellar-theatre in Roeland Street in 1843, all crimson and gold with large brass chandeliers; but men and women sat apart. A strong prejudice against the appearance of actresses lasted until the eighteen-fifties were well advanced.

The brick Theatre Royal in Harrington Street, opened in 1860, saw many fine performances. Later came the Theatre Royal, Burg Street, twice devastated by fire. In the eighteen-nineties came two theatres that so many remember with real affection – the Good Hope Theatre (now the government stationery office) and the Opera House.

On the Good Hope Theatre site overlooking Stal Plein there once stood the unpretentious Cape House of Assembly. There, too, exhibitions were held and an Italian opera company played for a season in an unsuitable building with an iron

roof. Many shows were held in the open air, and Charles du Val, the impersonator, complained that the south-easter blew the words out of his mouth.

The Good Hope Theatre was a little smaller than the Opera House, but actors loved it. A whisper on the stage could be heard at the back of the gallery, so perfect were the acoustics. Seats were blue plush, walls were white and gold, and the curtain was of royal blue velvet. At the back of the dress circle was the gallery, often packed with enthusiastic Malays. The Governor used to walk across to the theatre, and everyone in town found the site convenient.

Bert and Fred Wheeler put on “Charley's Aunt”, played by the Charles Hawtrey repertory company, at the Good Hope Theatre opening. Between plays the theatre became a music-hall, with such memorable shows as the Steel-Payne Bellringers and the Australian Lilliputians. The final play before the theatre closed down in 1910 was “Het Geheim”.

Claims that the Opera House was the finest theatre in the Southern Hemisphere were made at the opening on August 31, 1893. Only four theatres in England at that time had larger stages. The Opera House held more than a thousand people. Concrete and iron were used throughout the auditorium, and the fireproof curtain was a formidable affair. Cape Town had been without a theatre since the disastrous

fire in the Theatre Royal, Burg Street; and the designers of the Opera House had taken no chances in this £40,000 building.

First star of the Opera House on that opening night was Leonore Braham, prima donna, in the title role of “Dorothy”, the three-act comic opera. Her voice filled the large house. A box cost five guineas, and a seat in the gallery three shillings.

Many of you have your own memories of the forty-three years of the Opera House. Some recall great spectacles such as “Chu Chin Chow” and “White Horse Inn”. Others still carry an impression of Pavlova dancing before a black curtain. That wide stage held the Quinlan Opera Company, Balieff and his Chauve Souris, Sybil Thorndike in “Saint Joan”. But the soul of the old Opera House was Leonard Rayne. He and Freda Godfrey kept it going in the difficult years after World War I with “East Lynne” and “The Three Musketeers”, “While London Sleeps” and “The Royal Divorce”.

I remember Rayne vividly enough, though the man who really seemed to be part of the building to me was John Lewis Akkersdyk, the photographer. He attended every first night for more than forty years, always wearing his silk, open-neck shirt. “Akkie” was the theatrical photographer, and he had ten thousand negatives of actors and actresses in his studio. Akkersdyk's father was a Hollander, but “Akkie” was born and brought up in London and described himself as a Cockney.

When the Opera House was demolished a lead casket was recovered from beneath the foundation stone. It contained copies of the newspapers of November 14, 1891, a portrait of the mayor of that year, photographs of Cape Town, all the coins in use from a golden sovereign down to a halfpenny, a bottle of olive oil and a nicely-matured bottle of sherry.

Cape Town's first music-hall was started by Mr. J. L. (Joe) Sacks in the Oddfellows Hall, Plein Street, shortly after the South African War, when the town was filled with troops clamouring for entertainment. A Canadian regiment wrecked it. Then came the Tivoli, with its small stage and intimate blue horseshoe auditorium and gilt trimmings. After thirty years it had to give way to a bazaar.

FORERUNNER OF the bioscope almost throughout last century was the diorama or panorama – a huge cylinder of transparent material painted with scenes which could be lighted from many angles. Thus certain details stood out in strong relief.

Thompson, an American, brought his “Great Southern Diorama” to Cape Town in 1874 and set it up in the Oddfellows' Hall. This was a Civil War show, with the *Alabama* fighting the *Hatteras* and many battle scenes on shore. It ended with the funeral of Stonewall Jackson; and marionettes were used so cleverly in the procession that the audience applauded vigorously.

It was on July 13, 1896, that Cape Town saw the first moving pictures screened. Carl Hertz, an illusionist, had brought the projector with him as part of his show. A full-length programme would have been out of the question, as the pictures flickered abominably. Hertz's films lasted about ninety seconds each, and showed Scottish dances, soldiers marching and a boxing match. The newspapers grasped the significance of the new form of entertainment, however, and *The Cape Argus* commented: "No one should miss seeing this wonderful product of modern science. It is like standing in a London street and watching the crowds of people and vehicles passing by. While being actual photographs there is this peculiarity – the figures move, horses trot past, drawing cabs and omnibuses, and men and women walk about. One photograph is that of a skirt dancer, and every movement of figure and drapery is beautifully reproduced."

Hertz called his apparatus a cinematograph. Other showmen followed with similar projectors, but each one used a different name – veriscope, heliochromoscope and so on. In 1897, however, a Mr. James arrived with a bioscope, and that name stuck. Cine cameras were used in South Africa during that early period. Rhodes and Kruger appeared on the dimly-lit screens. Cape Town to Sea Point by electric trolley car was probably the first travel short made in the Peninsula. Wolfram showed South African War films in the Good Hope Hall in 1900.

The bioscope became a regular part of Cape Town's life in 1903, when the Tivoli opened and included films in every variety programme. But the first cinema pure and simple was the Theatre de Luxe in Adderley Street, opened in September 1909. Wolfram, a travelling showman for years, settled down next door in 1910 and started Wolfram's Bioscope. Two years later the first talkies arrived, so that you could see people on the screen breaking plates, and hear the crash almost at the right moment. It took a long time to turn the talkies into a real entertainment.

On the other hand the bioscope started controversies even in the days of flicker and frequent snapping of the film. A brief life of Marie Antoinette screened in 1903 was criticized because it ended, truthfully enough, with the knife of the guillotine coming down.

Three years later the Marconi Bioscope Company drew thousands to the Good Hope to see “a most wonderful series of pictures of the Spanish inquisition.” These torture scenes were too much for the crowd, and when a woman was flogged the yelling rose to such a pitch that the film had to be stopped. Men tore down the screen. Chairs were smashed. A Roman Catholic in the audience went on to the stage and denounced “fakes in the lowest possible taste”. The police restored order.

CAPE TOWN'S greatest open-air show, the finest organized spectacle of the centuries, was the 1910 pageant. It lasted for two days, cost £30,000, and was performed by five thousand people – from Bushmen to titled men and women. This national event, marking the union of the four provinces, drew 40,000 visitors to Cape Town. Councillor Drake and Mr. J. R. Finch, the town clerk, shared the honour of suggesting the celebration which gave Cape Town world-wide publicity.

Frank Lascelles, most famous pageant master of the period, organiser of the great Canadian pageant at Quebec, was engaged to superintend the vast production. He sent an assistant, F. H. Markoe, ahead of him. Lascelles arrived in Cape Town three months before the opening.

Union Day passed quietly in 1910, for King Edward VII had died early in May. Church services, tree-planting ceremonies and the issue of ten thousand medals to school-children took the place of the more lively festivals which had been planned. By October that year, however, the whole country was ready for active rejoicing. Adderley Street was so brilliantly illuminated that the Cape Argus said: "It compares with the most elaborate electrical displays in London." Transvaal, Natal

and Orange Free State archways were built in Adderley Street, while the Cape archway stood at the pageant ground entrance at the foot of the street.

Wrecks were blown up to restore Table Bay, as far as possible, to its original, unspoilt beauty. There was no esplanade in those days. The ground sloped gently to the bay, and buildings were removed so that no jarring anachronisms would intrude on the pageant scenes. Rehearsals were held in the blinding dust of south-easters, however, and Cape Town feared a fiasco. Lascelles and the thousands of performers stuck to their tasks, and calm weather came at the end of October.

Many people were nervous about the huge grandstand. It was larger than anything built at the Cape before, and designed to hold five thousand people. But the town engineer had done his work well, and the concrete blocks stood up to the weight.

It was still possible to find Bushmen in the North-West Cape at that time, and a band of them were brought to Cape Town for the pageant. They opened the whole show, hunting with bows and arrows, dancing the baboon dance, and retreating before the Hottentots.

Then came Bartholomew Diaz and his men to set up their cross. In the following scene, depicting the Court of King John II of Portugal, Diaz was seen relating his adventures. Lascelles demanded an enormous green carpet for the court scene. It was made of strips of dyed hessian sewn together; and the weight was a problem.

A party of 130 Basutos, crowned with war plumes, had arrived to take part in the pageant; and Lascelles enrolled them as property men.

The Basutos had never seen the sea before, and they were delighted with the experience. They called Lascelles “the little man with the big voice”, and obeyed his whistle with enthusiasm. So well-drilled were these Basutos that they handled the carpet expertly, earning rounds of applause. Unwittingly they “stole the show”.

Most dramatic moment of the first day of the pageant was the landing of Van Riebeeck. For weeks a well-known diver, Mr. W. Lee, and Armourer Sergeant W. G. Southwood had been at work transforming the wooden hulk of an Italian sailing ship into a replica of the *Dromedaris*. Cape Town watched with deep interest as a poop, twenty-six feet high, rose over the stern, while nine guns (including a stern-chaser) were mounted. The final effect was realistic, and *The Cape Argus* declared: “Best of all is the little *Dromedaris*, drowsing the long sea tides away. The illusion is perfect; the tides of time have rolled back for us and again there are lions roaring in the track of the Oranjezicht luncheon tram.”

So the *Dromedaris* sailed in to the astonishment of the Hottentots, fired a fifteen-gun salute with her carronades, lowered her boats and landed Van Riebeeck and seventy-four men, women and children.

Another memorable scene was Lady Anne Barnard's party at the Castle, with the guests taking part in a country dance. The finale was an enormous mass of colour, and all the five thousand performers appeared. Markoe envisaged this allegory. "The scene shall represent a vast, silent veld, with the eternal sea on one side and immutable mountains on the other," he wrote. "First there shall be a silence, and then a low, sad, tremulous music, rising and rising, plaintive and restless; rising and rising; strange and dishevelled; rising and rising, agonised and tortured. Suddenly on all sides are present a host of dark forms with veiled faces, fleeing hither and thither in disordered motion, and uttering half-articulate cries of woe. These are the hordes of ignorance, cruelty, savagery, unbelief, war, pestilence, famine and their ilk, the pitiless progenitors of all the misery of man."

"In an instant the music changes and silver-clad children appear with branches of a silver tree in their hands. As they enter, the air is filled with a flight of doves, the soft grey doves of peace. The forms of darkness are driven back and put to rout."

Thus ended the pageant, Hamilton Fyfe of the London *Daily Mail* cabled that the finale was the grandest pageant spectacle ever seen. The *Cape*

Argus had a cartoon of Van Riebeeck dancing on his pedestal and exclaiming: “I feel quite young again.”

Sir Frederick Smith, mayor of Cape Town, presented Lascelles with a gold casket and cigarette case. “I do not believe that any one person who took part in those scenes will ever forget them,” declared Lascelles. “And I am perfectly certain that no one who saw them will think little in future of this great new country.”

The Cape Argus commented: “Certain of the scenes were almost too true to life. They touched the heart-strings and brought tears to the eyes – the trials, the courage, the adventurous spirit of the early settlers.”

Probably survivors of the pageant committee still have the brooches issued to them – a swastika device, of no evil significance forty years ago.

And the little *Dromedaris*? After the pageant two boilers, each weighing seventeen tons, were lifted on board and the hulk was decked over. The boilers were destined for the Forest Creek goldfields in the Knysna district. So the *Dromedaris*, shorn of her pageant finery, was towed round to Knysna by the coaster *Agnar*. The boilers were worth £1,500, so the hulk was broken up and the boilers rolled out.

There was an auction sale of other relics on the pageant ground. Reluctantly Cape Town went back to work.

CHAPTER 19

CITY OF TEARS

YELLOW flags and crosses daubed in yellow ochre on stricken houses – that was the scene in Cape Town for months in 1901 while the great bubonic plague epidemic lasted. Bubonic plague was the “Black Death” that raged in Europe during the fourteenth century. It was the identical plague that caused 70,000 deaths in London in 1665, the year when the cart-drivers cried: “Bring out your dead.”

Up to 1901 bubonic plague was unknown in Cape Town and almost unknown in South Africa. Six years previously, however, the cause had been discovered in Hong Kong, and it was realized that rats spread the plague. The Haffkine prophylactic, giving a measure of immunity, was available.

Cape Town was an ideal breeding ground. One doctor with plague experience in India declared that the Cape Town slums of the period were filthier than Bombay. For months rats had been dying at Table Bay Docks, but no one bothered to report it until eight days before the first case occurred. The victim was a European clerk who had been working in a military office at the docks.

Dr. John Gregory, Medical Officer of Health for the Cape Colony, found this man in the Woodstock Cottage Hospital, where the disease had been diagnosed as typhoid. Gregory recognized it as bubonic plague and declared the city infected. That was early in February.

They called Dr. Gregory the “Sanitary Czar”. He took charge of a situation far too serious for the city health authorities to handle, and carried out drastic measures in spite of some ill feeling.⁶ All suspicious illnesses had to be reported. Dr. Gregory set up an isolation hospital and contact camp at Uitvlugt on the Cape Flats. He sent soldiers with fixed bayonets to evict seven thousand natives from the slums and placed them in a location at Maitland. Then he declared war on rats, all Cape Town joined willingly in the slaughter, and the Town Council paid a reward of a tickey for every dead rat produced. Soon there was a panic stricken exodus of rats from the city. They trekked through the sewers in thousands and out on to the beaches.

⁶ Not long after the epidemic started Dr. Gregory had the benefit of the advice of Sir William Simpson, an authority on plague who came to Cape Town from India at the request of the Cape Government.

A touch of humour was provided by a sentry at a Table Bay shore battery who reported the enormous column of rats passing his post. He was sent to hospital for observation, and released only when his commanding officer had seen the rat army for himself.

When the shops had sold out all their rat-traps *The Cape Argus* told its readers how to construct a home-made cage and pointed out that rats could be lured into this trap with the aid of oil of aniseed.

A man in the Gardens reported to the Plague Advisory Board that a little girl had delivered a parcel to his house. After her departure he found that the parcel contained two dead rats, which he burnt. He protested that it was a poor joke to play at such a time.

The plague frightened Cape Town and thousands of native labourers shouted “Hamba Kya” and clamoured for passes so that they could return to their homes. They were not allowed to leave. Native dock labourers struck, but were persuaded to return to work. The docks were dangerous. Ships from every corner of the globe had been discharging cargoes without precautions. For some time every fresh case of plague was traced to the docks. At first there was only one horse-drawn ambulance and two wagonettes to carry plague victims to Uitvlugt. Later the army supplied

yeomanry ambulances with the dreaded yellow markings. Every night the dying and the dead were removed from the slums.

Along the Sea Point front huge bonfires blazed as alarmed householders piled up the rubbish of years. Ownerless dogs were destroyed: "Instead of keeping the city clean there is now the colossal task of making it clean," wrote a householder to *The Cape Argus*. "The cost will be enormous, the anxieties, sufferings and losses of the people incalculable. The scourge is here."

Cleansing staffs went through infected houses tearing up wooden floors, burning furniture, scraping walls, drenching everything in carbolic or formalin. More than four hundred houses were treated in this way during the epidemic, and the damage was repaired by the authorities at the end of the outbreak. Bedding was disinfected on the foreshore. Coloured people who had been evicted went into camp on Green Point Common.

Convicts cleaned the streets, with a remission of one day in their sentences for every day's work in the danger areas. Public vehicles were disinfected daily. The docks were closed to the public. Every traveller entering or leaving Cape Town had to undergo strict medical examination. Sales on the Parade were prohibited. Among the buildings which had to be evacuated

was the Young Women's Christian Association in Long Street. All the girls shared a marquee at Uitvlugt.

Someone spread a rumour that the Haffkine prophylactic was dangerous. However, five thousand Europeans and ten thousand natives submitted to inoculation. After-effects were unpleasant, and many temperatures rose to 103 degrees.

The Malays disapproved of the handling of their sick and dead by people outside their own community, and on March 9 they attacked an ambulance and helped a number of Malay contacts to escape. Police had to be called out to deal with Malay resistance. At the request of the Colonial Secretary the imams held a meeting in the Chiappini Street Mosque and urged their people not to hide plague cases. Dr. Gregory appointed special Malay attendants and cooks at the plague camps.

Early in April, Dr. Gregory reported that the plague was increasing in severity. There had been 315 cases and 107 deaths. Sudden deaths were common. By the middle of May there were 619 patients in the plague hospital, and 282 had died. Not far away four thousand contacts had been isolated.

Medical officers and nurses at the plague camp were not spared and among those who died was the matron, Miss E. M. Kayser. Governor Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson was greatly admired when he visited the hospital and shook hands with a number of patients. As one newspaper remarked: "There is a ten-foot fence patrolled by armed guards all round the plague camp, and many people would not venture near it for a King's ransom."

The Rev. G. R. Gresley of Claremont lived with the victims as camp chaplain. The camp was set up in forest clearings, with many huts and avenues of tents. A special plague train carried passengers and supplies to the camp.

In the records of the contact camp I discovered another touch of comedy. A man arrived in frock coat, silk hat and spats and informed the doctor: "I always like to be on the safe side. Every morning I bathe in a solution of coal tar. I disinfect my feet and boots with carbolic several times a day: I wear a plague-prevention tablet round my neck, saturate my handkerchief in formalin for inhaling purposes and rub my chest with eucalyptus. Finally, I always have an antiseptic lozenge dissolving under my tongue."

The doctor assured this careful man that these precautions would ward off all danger.

While the epidemic was at its height Prince and Princess Kalanianaʻole passed through Cape Town on their way home to the Hawaiian Islands. In an interview the Prince remarked: “We do not like Cape Town – it is as filthy a city as I have ever been in. No wonder you have the plague.”

Bubonic plague is a slow menace, and in Cape Town it lingered for months. Early in June, however, the medical officers decided that it was abating and that it would be safe to invite the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to visit the Cape later in the year.

At the end of June a writer in *The Cape Argus* stated: “The plague returns are getting smaller by degrees, much to the regret of numbers of persons who have for the last few months held most lucrative positions in different branches of the plague service.”

About a month later there had been nearly eight hundred victims, and nearly four hundred had died. Then the vigorous control measures carried out by Dr. Gregory were successful and the last yellow flags disappeared. Cape Town undoubtedly owed much to resolute and skilful Dr. John Gregory, the “Sanitary Czar”.

“OUR CITY has experienced the greatest calamity on record – an epidemic, serious and virulent, which has caused death and distress among rich and poor alike.”

It was October 31, 1918, the “Black October” of dreadful memory, and Mr. W. J. Thorne, Mayor of Cape Town, was addressing a City Council meeting. For a month the war news had been dominated by death close at hand. For a month Cape Town had been a city of tears.

This was indeed a calamity. It had been impossible to count all the dead, but at least six thousand people in the Cape Peninsula had perished, while more than 122,000 had suffered from the disease. As *The Cape Argus* remarked while the epidemic was at its height: “If the streets of Cape Town become a little more desolate than they are at present, we shall be able to form some idea of the appearance of London at the time of the Great Plague.”

Late in September that year an influenza epidemic appeared in other centres in the Union, and a number of members of the South African Native Labour Corps, camped on the Rosebank showground, had gone down with it. Yet a newspaper writer declared “No figures available give any ground for any scare”.

Even when the Cape Hospital Board met on September 25 the discussion showed that there was no expectation of an epidemic in the minds of members. On October

1 war news still dominated *The Cape Argus*: “Bulgaria's Surrender – End at Last in Sight.” Elsewhere in the paper, however, a telegram recorded an alarming outbreak of influenza at Kimberley.

Next day a sweet factory in Cape Town closed down, a murder case had to be remanded because all the witnesses were ill, the telephone service was affected and business houses were becoming disorganized. The onset was as sudden as that. People in boarding-houses came down to breakfast to find that the waiters had vanished. Many a housewife looked in vain for the milk-bottle and newspaper.

But still the gravity of the epidemic was not realized. “Ordinary colds are being described as Spanish influenza,” reported *The Cape Argus*. “Many cases of illness are probably due to the changeable weather.”

Cape Town's normal death rate at that time was ten a day, but on October 3 it was up to thirty-seven. Advertisements in the newspapers reflected the epidemic—medicines and disinfectants were prominent, while brandy was boldly declared to be “the best cure”. (There was some truth in this.) And still the people of Cape Town did not imagine the horror to come.

“It would be a mistake to treat the matter lightly, and several medical men have warned the public against neglecting precautions,” remarked *The Cape Argus*

leading article. “But given ordinary care and common sense, there seems no reason for anxiety.”

That day the streets were half-deserted. The tramways had 160 men away, *The Cape Argus* 89, the police 69. On October 5 the price of oranges and lemons had risen to “black market” levels as the railways had been unable to handle the usual supplies. Many bakeries were closed.

Doctors, of course, felt the full strain. Their consulting rooms were besieged, and one doctor said he had hundreds of telephone calls a day. Another doctor remarked: “It is not safe for me to put my nose out of doors – I am mobbed wherever I go.”

When the City Council met on October 7, Dr. Abdurahman stated that he knew houses where people had been lying helpless for days without anyone to bring them food or water. Mr. A. J. MacCallum declared that corpses were lying in the streets awaiting removal. There were more than a hundred deaths that day. Bodies were taken to the police morgue, for the undertakers could not meet the demand.

Soup kitchens were opened next day. Canon Lavis was pleading for bedding for the centre he had opened at St. Paul's in Bree Street. “The supply of coffins is pathetically short,” he pointed out, “but this is by no means so serious a matter as

the shortage of food, comforts and remedies for living patients. Our care must be for the living.”

Babies were brought from homes where there was no one alive to care for them and sent to a special depot. (The epidemic left two thousand orphans.) Volunteers registered at the City Hall, and these included a hundred students from the South African College, ready to work in any capacity.

Dr. A. Jasper Anderson, the Cape Town medical officer of health, organized a free supply of medicines at depots in the city and suburbs. “Keep in the open air as much as possible,” Dr. Anderson advised citizens. “Avoid assemblies of people. Doses of ammoniated tincture of quinine should be taken as a preventive. Go to bed and keep warm if the symptoms of the disease appear. Take plenty of milk and acid drinks.”

Nothing could halt the speed of the epidemic. On October 9 the morgues were so full that bodies had to be taken to Woodstock beach and buried in trenches. That day there were 250 deaths. Criminal and civil courts were closed. Prisoners were dying at Roeland Street gaol – including a man awaiting trial for murder.

An influenza victim, suffering from depression, jumped to death from a window in Sir Lowry Road. The medical depot at the City Hall supplied 700 gallons of medicines and 25,000 five grain doses of aspirin.

Citizens who had escaped the onslaught responded magnificently to the desperate appeals for help. To the City Hall food depot they brought sacks of vegetables, cases of tinned meat and milk, and mountains of bread. Owners of motor-cars formed a volunteer contingent to carry doctors and supplies. But out at Maitland cemetery the superintendent, Mr. E. Hutt, announced: "We count our burials now by hundreds a day. It is dreadful."

It was disastrous. Here is a record of a typical scene at the City Hall, which had become the medical and relief headquarters. A man rushed in at night, frantic with worry. "My wife is going to have a baby. She is dying. I can't get a doctor. What shall I do?"

"There are no doctors. You can leave your name and address, and we'll try to attend to your case first thing in the morning." The man left with tears running down his cheeks to return to his desolate home, his dying wife and unborn child.

All over the city the tragedy of the epidemic was mounting to its climax. By October 12, however, the headlines were more cheerful. "Epidemic Abating – Town Becoming More Lively." Soon doctors were warning the people not to get up until they had fully recovered. "Fully ninety per cent of the deaths are due to disregard of this advice," they urged. By October 15 the death roll had reached five thousand.

It was not over yet. Ellerslie High School at Sea Point, one of the temporary hospitals, had a long waiting-list. And at the City Hall there were still eight thousand applications a day for free medicines.

Starving dogs were roaming the streets in search of food, and there was an appeal for volunteers to collect them.

Dr. Jasper Anderson declared on October 17 that the situation was improving hourly. Four days later *The Cape Argus* reported: "Today the streets have resumed much of their wonted appearance of hustle and cheerfulness, and the feeling that the epidemic is conquered is reflected in the countenances of pedestrians. For the first time since the outbreak was recognized as serious one noticed a few people taking a leisurely and sociable morning tea on balconies."

Mercifully there were no serious fires in the city during the epidemic. In fact, the brigade was called out only four times, twice to false alarms. At the height of the epidemic there were only eleven firemen on duty out of fifty men in the brigade.

Theatres and cinemas, closed since October 7, were fumigated and reopened on October 30 – "The Girl in the Taxi" on the stage at the Opera House, Olga Petrova in "The Scarlet Woman" at Wolframs. On the last day of "Black October" the epidemic vanished from the headlines on the main news page of *The Cape Argus* – but not from the memories of those who survived.

Cape Town's social conscience had been stirred. People who had never given a thought to the overcrowded slums realized for the first time the deadly significance of such conditions. At the adjourned City Council meeting on October 31 a £250,000 housing scheme was debated, and there was talk of “human beings being housed worse than rats”.

For many months a close watch was kept on incoming ships. Cape Town, it seemed, had imported the epidemic from Sierra Leone; two military transports crammed with men of the South African Native Labour Corps had touched there during September, and the repatriated natives had spread the disease. So one mail-boat after another was quarantined in Table Bay, and “thermometer parades” were held on board daily.

While the epidemic was at its height the Portuguese mail steamer *Lourenco Marques* put into Table Bay docks on her way to Portugal. The voyage that followed was one of the most tragic in modern times. Before the ship reached Lisbon, two hundred of those who had sailed in her, passengers and crew, had been sewn up in canvas and buried at sea.

Many people refused to believe that influenza could have killed thousands in Cape Town, millions throughout the world. They said it must have been a plague. (Only the plague of the sixth century and the medieval “Black Death” had claimed more

victims.) The official commission which investigated the scourge in the Union, however, reported that the “Spanish influenza” was identical with the disease which had ravaged the world and had nothing in common with pneumonic, bubonic or septicaemic plague.

Cape Town, like other cities, experienced the highest death rates among people in the thirties and forties. Children and old people, though not immune, suffered less heavily. Pregnant women were the most vulnerable class. Europeans born in South Africa were affected more severely than those born overseas. There was an influenza pandemic (a world-wide pestilence) in the eighties of last century, and it has been suggested that those who survived that onslaught were proofed to some extent against the 1918 visitation.

“Black October” passed, and in November came the end of World War I and the celebrations that overshadowed much suffering. But few of those who lived through “Black October” in Cape Town have forgotten the nightmare.

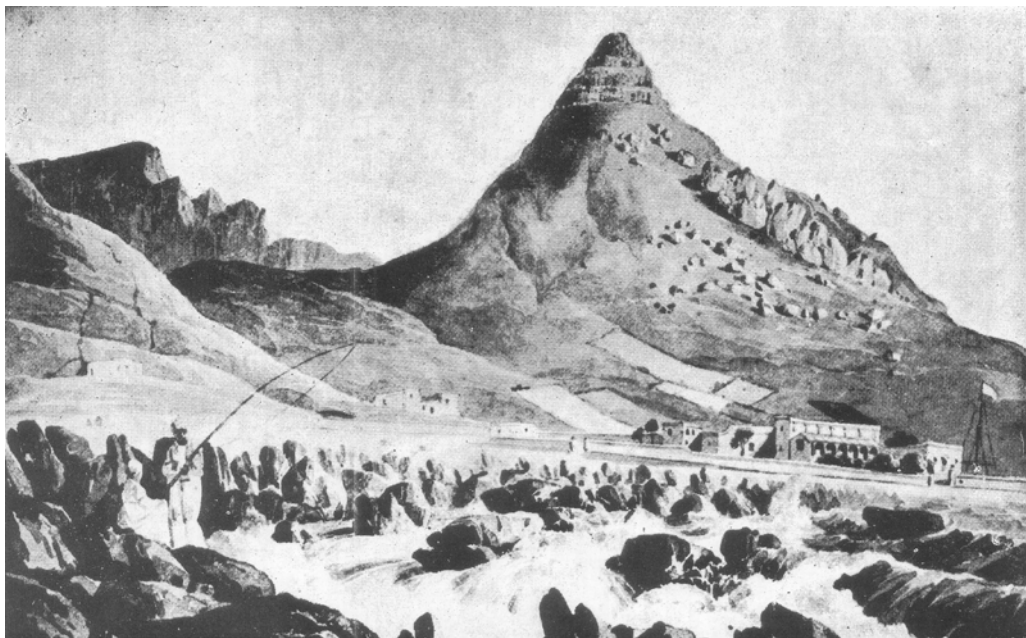
One mother told me how she hired a taxi and drove to The Strand to fetch her son home from camp. “All the way I saw farm carts with coffins – and most of them carried more than one coffin,” she remembered.

Someone else remembered a delirious woman wandering along the empty beach front at Camps Bay clad only in a nightgown. And there was a man at Sea Point

who was aroused late at night by a knock on the front door. His whole family was down with influenza.

He opened the door and heard a voice saying: “Are you the party that ordered two coffins?”

“I never forgot that,” he told me. And Cape Town has never forgotten the darkest month in all its three centuries.



Three Anchor Bay in 1832

CHAPTER 20

FIRE AND WATER

Many a cottage in the Cape, many a stately home has vanished when the thatch caught fire. This is a tale of disaster as old as Cape Town. Van Riebeeck lost his own thatched house at Bosheuvel. Again and again the whole Table Valley settlement was threatened by bush fires – or the torches, candles and pipes of the inhabitants. Month after month the rattle-watch and the church bells sounded the alarm.

Small fire-engines called “garden spouts” were imported early in the eighteenth century and sold to the public at fifty rix-dollars apiece; and in 1737 a regular fire-brigade was organized. Fines, floggings and bread-and-water diets were among the punishments for carelessness. Cape Town's greatest fire during the whole Dutch period occurred in 1789. It destroyed the hospital at the top of the Heerengracht, a building with seven hundred beds which had stood for nearly a century.

Thatched roofs were banned in Cape Town early last century, though old roofs of that material were allowed to remain. At this period there were still a number of privately-owned fire-engines, three of them operated by the Dutch Reformed Church. One of the last thatched buildings in Cape Town proper, owned by Mr. J. Vos in Buitengracht, was burnt down in 1837.

In the suburbs and the country towns, of course, whole streets of tightly-packed houses remained under thatch. Cape Town had to send a special train with three hundred soldiers and volunteer firemen to Stellenbosch in 1875, for the whole upper part of the town was a sheet of fire and the two local fire-engines could not deal with it. But for these reinforcements with fire-engines and hundreds of buckets, all Stellenbosch might have been destroyed.

Forty thatched houses went up in flames in Wellington that year, and the damage was estimated at £15,000. Caledon had a disastrous fire at the same period. Some dry bushes in the backyard of Mrs. Jones's Hotel caught alight during a strong south-easter. There was no fire-brigade. Another hotel, the Dutch Reformed Church school and ten private houses were destroyed.

You could compile a long, sad list of the famous Cape mansions which have suffered or been lost through fire in the thatch. Late last century there was Groote Schuur. Elsenburg was seriously damaged. Then came the Groot Constantia fire. Nooitgedacht in the Gardens was set alight by sparks from a mountain fire, and the flames took most of the building, including two wooden figures carved by Anreith. Fire in the thatch – that was the fear that caused some owners of fine old homesteads to cut away their beautiful gables and replace the mellow roofs with corrugated iron. Yet thatch, the

most comfortable and picturesque of all roofing materials, has a stronger appeal today than ever before.

Once upon a time thatch was regarded as a sign of poverty. Now it costs half as much again in the Cape Peninsula as other roofs; it costs two or three times as much to insure the house; and in spite of all fires it is in great demand. Most of the Cape Peninsula's thatch is the pale yellow *dek-riet* from the Riversdale and Albertinia dunes. Once looked upon as a dangerous weed, the *dek-riet* is now carefully preserved. Wheat straws used in England are not favoured here, and the vleï grass from the Mamre district is not considered as good as the sand reed.

Albertinia alone produces a million bundles of reed a year. The variety preferred by the experts has a waxy exterior which keeps the rain out effectively. It must be the male (or *mannetjie riet*) of the species, cut during the ripe period between February and April. If a clump is properly cut it will grow again to its full height of seven feet within three years. Strange to say, the farmers in the Duinestreek seldom thatch their houses. They have to catch rainwater during the winter, and so they use corrugated iron to avoid the discoloured water from thatch.

Thatching runs in families in the Cape Peninsula. In its highest form it is a craft calling for hereditary skill. Teams of coloured men also come to town from the Elim mission to carry out thatching contracts.

Using a bill-hook and knife, the thatcher starts at the eaves and works upwards, securing each successive row to the framework with tarred rope-yarn. A man inside passes the needle and yarn to the man on the roof. Thatch is laid to a thickness of seven or eight inches. Thinner, it may not keep out the rain. Thicker, there is a risk of rot. A pitch of forty-five degrees is desirable. Such a roof should last half a century; and if a master craftsman has been at work, his great-grandson may only be called upon to renew the thatch at the end of a century.

Moreover, if the roof has been laid with great skill, the natural matting of the surface reduces the fire hazard. Reeds soaked in a solution of lime or alum are fire-resistant for a time, but unfortunately the effect wears off. The man who can produce a completely fireproof thatch should be assured of a high reward.

CAPE TOWN was flooded often enough before the days of storm water drains. Turning over the *The Cape Argus* files for June, 1872, I came across “the heaviest fall of rain within the recollection of the oldest inhabitant.”

A reporter with a dry sense of humour contributed an anecdote to the story of streets like rivers. “Several sailors had visited an inn, and were leaving it unconscious of the changed condition of the streets,” he recorded guilelessly. “They all fell into a sluit in front of the door, which had four feet of water in it.”

Less than seventy years ago Cape Town's main water supply was the Molteno reservoir, Oranjezicht, with a capacity of 50,000,000 gallons. The bursting of this reservoir was a dramatic episode in Cape Town's water history.

The reservoir was completed in 1881. A leak was observed at the outlet tunnel during August the following year. No serious effects were expected, but sandbags were placed at the weakest point and two men were left on guard. One Sunday morning the leak increased and the water roared out. The fierce cascade was red and thick with clay sediment from the bottom of the reservoir.

Orange Street became a river, and *The Cape Argus* reported: “Foaming, turbulent red falls spread themselves in every direction. If the torrent had not been diverted by storm water sluits the damage would have been much greater.”

People returning from church had difficulty in reaching their homes. Many householders dammed up their gateways with planks, lumber and bags of earth. A man who drove a light cart into Orange Street to help people struggling across the stream had to jump for it, and the cart was smashed. Some people climbed from stoep to stoep to avoid the rushing waters.

Down the Avenue raced the torrent. The kitchen garden at Government House was swamped. Red slime was deposited everywhere. “The streets were full of loungers watching what was styled the 'Red Sea' moving to its outfall in the bay,” went on *The Cape Argus*. “Table Bay was reddened for a large part of its surface.”

Mr. Cairncross, the city engineer, and city councillors hastened to the Molteno reservoir to see what could be done. A baker supplied hundreds of sacks, and volunteers tried to dam the outlet. It was not until nightfall, however, that the flood could be controlled.

“Whom to Hang?” inquired *The Cape Argus* in a leading article next day. “No doubt this is the first question that everyone asks when there is a calamity such as yesterday, when Orange Street was converted into a roaring African river, bearing away to the sea the water for which we might well give gold in a few months' time.”

Cape Town was troubled by one of its many smallpox epidemics at the period, and everyone wondered what the summer would bring. Fortunately it was possible to make temporary repairs, and water was stored again before the winter rains ended. But the Molteno reservoir had suffered £10,000 worth of damage, and it took three years to put it in order again.

Cape Town has always had water difficulties, and Van Riebeeck set about solving the problem with more energy than some of his successors. Not only male and female slaves, but soldiers, gardeners, boatmen and even clerks had to take a hand in building Cape Town's first reservoir. Rock was drilled by hand and chiselled out. The reservoir stood on the old General Post Office site, and it was filled by mountain streams which washed the first wall away.

Lead pipes were used before the end of the seventeenth century, but bored teak logs carried the main supply for more than a hundred years after that. If

the people of Cape Town had washed more often and drunk more water and less wine, their water shortages would have been more severe. Even so, rationing had to be enforced all through the centuries. In the days of runnels and sluice-gates there were always people who took more than their share; and so, in the middle of the eighteenth century, a fine of fifty rix-dollars (£10) was the penalty for diverting the flow at the wrong time.

There were thirty-six fountains in the town, and a householder who wished to have water piped into his home had to secure permission from the Governor himself. Greenmarket Square had a busy fountain; but the most handsome fountain of all, designed by Thibault, stood on the Parade.

Sir John Barrow gave a lively description of Cape Town's water problem late in the eighteenth century. "Part of the Table Mountain stream was conducted to a fountain at the lower part of the town, where many hundreds of slaves were accustomed to assemble, wrangling, fighting and rioting for their turn in fetching water," he wrote. "The Fiscal had two of his men constantly stationed there to preserve the peace."

Barrow was asked: "How do you contrive in London to get a supply of water? Here are not fewer than a thousand slaves occupied." Barrow then drew up a plan for supplying each house, and Lord Caledon put this scheme

into operation. One of the Hof Street reservoirs, built in 1819 as part of the scheme, was the first distributing reservoir in South Africa.

All but one of the old slave pumps have disappeared. The survivor, now an historic monument, is the Hurling Swaai pump in Prince Street, where the water spouted from a lion's mouth. Further up in the Oranjezicht was the main spring supplying the town – Stadsfontein as it was called.

Up to 1891 the whole of Cape Town's water came from springs on Table Mountain. Then a new catchment area, draining into Hout Bay, was tapped, and the water was diverted through the newly-built Woodhead Tunnel.

Cape Town's most severe water famine in recent times was in May, 1920, before the Steenbras dam and pipeline were constructed. Only ten days' supply remained in the Table Mountain reservoirs on the lowest day of that crisis. The mains were cut off for many hours a day, and anyone caught watering his garden found himself in the police court. Then the rains came...

MANY ELDERLY Capetonians must chuckle when they hear young people talking of a rainy winter as the wettest weather they can remember. Weather

memories are notoriously short. But they knew all about rain, floods and landslides in the Peninsula early this century.

Souvenir booklets, filled with photographs of destruction, were published in Cape Town in 1904 and 1905 – both years of winter havoc. At lunch-time on June 23, 1904, a dark, gigantic raincloud burst over the Gardens area. People in Breda Street ran as they saw a brown wave, two feet high, rushing towards them. Every house below road level in Mill Street was flooded.

That was Cape Town's warning. The rain went on. Table Mountain was an ominous panorama of waterfalls, and it should have been clear that further torrents were to be expected. Nevertheless, Cape Town was again taken by surprise two days later when a violent storm broke over Signal Hill. During one hour city rain gauges registered two and a half inches of water: The flood rushed down Wale Street, flooded the basements of St. George's and Adderley Streets and soaked the goods; on the ground floors of many shops. Within a few minutes the routine of the city had almost stopped, and for the next hour shop and office staffs were battling against the water. Planks and sacks were in great demand.

A man who was swept off his feet in St. George's Street found swimming easier than walking. Trains were delayed owing to flooded platforms. Ducks escaped from a crate and swam about the Cape Town Station.

Just one year later the floods came again, though in 1905 the suburbs suffered most of the damage. The first blow was felt on June 11 at Clifton. On the upper road stood Clifton House, a fine homestead built in 1825. Dr. John Philip, the missionary, had lived there, and in 1897 it was bought by Mr. S. S. B. Mills. Clifton House had stood peacefully for eighty years across the mouth of a steep, narrow ravine. The slave-built walls of brick and stone were two feet thick. It was a long, single-storey residence of the old Dutch type, L-shaped, with a short wing on the Sea Point side. A broad stoep ran along the front. Oaks and almonds grew in the terraced garden..

Mr. Mills stayed up late on the night of the disaster, for he had observed the torrent coming down the ravine and he was alarmed. With the storm water came mud and trees. Mr. Mills gathered a band of volunteers and tried to divert the stream from his house. It looked safe enough at 1:30 a.m. on Sunday, June 11, and everyone went to bed. Two hours later they were all out in the rain again, trying to deal with a fresh volume of water.

They went in exhausted to a late breakfast, hoping that all would be well, when they heard shouts from watchers on the road. Those shouts saved the lives of all in Clifton House. An avalanche was thundering down the ravine. In a matter of seconds, water, earth and trees swept through the doomed house, wrecked the garden, blocked the road and spread out over the hillside. Some of the debris reached the Clifton Hotel. Thousands of tons of mud, boulders and trees stopped the Camps Bay trams.

When the wrecked house was examined it was found that only the short wing remained. The drawing-room, dining-room, two bedrooms and kitchen had vanished; and the furniture was either smashed or missing. As one onlooker remarked: "The entire centre portion of the house had been cut clean away as if with a gigantic knife."

Finally it was discovered that the water-main (carrying the Sea Point supply) had broken on the pipe-track above the house. For a time the water had been dammed up by vegetation and earth. When the dam burst the whole ravine was swept bare, and the homestead could not resist the torrent.

Later in June, 1905, there was a landslide at Seaforth, Simon's Town. The council had just spent thousands of pounds on storm water drainage; and on June 15, 1905, the whole of the work was swept away.

At Woodstock, according to the records, each street leading down from the mountain became a river “and many Mrs. Partingtons were to be observed sweeping back the flood with their mops.” In Observatory the placid little Liesbeek overflowed its banks. Hartleyvale became a vlei five feet deep. Many gardens in Rondebosch were submerged. The German Club at Wynberg was flooded out.

Fish Hoek beach was transformed into one great lake, while at Simon's Town, it was said, “the proverbial oldest inhabitant believes that no such rain had fallen in the memory of man – or at least since the great floods of 1862.”

Descriptions of landslides and rockfalls on Table Mountain after heavy rain go back to the early years of the settlement. The Abbe de la Caille referred to a large rock which broke away from a precipice on the centre of Table Mountain in 1750. “The tracks, which extended for a league, were visible long afterwards,” he wrote.

Ten years later many rocks fell far into Table Valley, and farms on the Rondebosch side were damaged. Platteklip Gorge was blocked in 1801 by a huge rock which had fallen from the summit. So heavy was the rockfall of

June 6, 1830, and so loud the rumbling, that people ran out of their houses into the streets believing that an earthquake had occurred.

Again, in 1833, the roads to the southern suburbs and Camps Bay were blocked by enormous boulders, and a regiment of soldiers had to be called out to clear the obstructions.

Camps Bay was alarmed in August, 1923, by a ledge of rocks becoming detached from Blinkwater Gorge. They came down with a terrifying roar, but did no damage. In June the following year, however, a single rock rolled down the mountain at Muizenberg and burst into the middle of a villa. It knocked over a table which had just been laid for lunch and nearly killed the woman who had laid it.

Cape Town and the suburbs have been drenched again and again since then, mountain streams have run strongly. But there were more dramatic winters long ago – and if I may end on a note of foreboding, there are many more wet weather disasters to come.

CHAPTER 21

COLOURED CAPE TOWN

COLOUR is almost everywhere in Cape Town. All those brought up in the shadow of Table Mountain, as I was, are aware of a deeper shadow over thousands of lives. There are a great many, of course, who like to think of the coloured people as a race apart. I thought so at one time, when I started as a newspaper reporter at the old Caledon Square police courts and saw coloured wreckage brought shrieking and cursing before the magistrates day after day: During one painful demonstration in the dock I overheard an old magistrate (an Englishman by birth) remark to himself: "Can they be human?" He might have said the same thing if he had been trying a razor gang in Glasgow or a Paris apache. No race may be judged by the lowest of its criminals.

Colour consciousness has never been more acute than it is now that new laws, designed to keep white and coloured apart, have come into force. Below the surface, Cape Town seethes with tragedies caused by this legislation. Nearly every day the newspapers bring some fresh and often surprising example to the surface. It has long been tragic, the mingling of white and coloured; but now it is a criminal affair as well. The tempo of the old drama has mounted with this new twist and has become frightening indeed.

You do not have to go deeply into the life of coloured Cape Town to realize that the barriers have been put up too late – three centuries too late. Turn back the pages of the records and the whole story will become clear, though it may not be exactly the story you expect.

When the first Dutch settlers landed there was no colour prejudice as we understand it today. There was, however, a strong religious feeling against Christians marrying heathens. If a heathen was converted – well, that made a respectable marriage. Colour prejudice springs from fear, and the well-armed Hollanders had no obiding fear of the Hottentots they found on the shores of Table Bay. It should be noted that Hollanders in the East Indies still have no colour prejudice. For generations they have married Eastern women; and out there, and in Holland, their coloured wives and descendants suffer no legal or social disabilities.

At the Cape, however, there was a barrier more formidable even than religion. It was the repulsive appearance of the women of the now extinct Hottentot race. They had ugly faces and enormous buttocks, and they smeared themselves with grease. Even a sex-starved sailor from a Dutch East India ship did not often fancy a Hottentot woman. So there was not much mingling. Today the fantastic mixture of races forming the coloured

people of Cape Town reveals very little Hottentot blood. You have to go into the country to discover the Hottentot strain, the peppercorn hair and steatopygia.

Nevertheless, there were a few unhappy experiments. One of the first Hottentots that Van Riebeeck met was a headman named Herry, who had been taken to England and learnt English. Van Riebeeck took Herry into his house, dressed him as a European and had his meals with him. Herry's niece Eva also joined the Commander's household. This girl has been described as “the mother of the Cape coloured race”.

Eva was baptized. She spoke Dutch fluently at the age of sixteen, but there her civilized veneer ended. Often she cast off her finery and returned to her own people to indulge in drunken revelry. She had two illegitimate children – one by a European – before she was twenty-one. That is the first record of a half-caste at the Cape.

In spite of her abandoned behaviour, Eva married Pieter van Meerhof, the surgeon, and that was the first mixed marriage at the Cape. It had the blessing of Commander Wagenaar, and a feast was held at the Fort; but it ended more disastrously than many other mixed marriages that followed. You can find it all in the history books, right down to the page in the journal

where Eva is described as “this drunken swine, this Hottentot pig”. The writer of Eva's death notice said that she was “transformed from a female Hottentot almost into a Netherland woman”, but he added: “She quenched the fire of her sensuality by death, affording a manifest example that nature, however closely and firmly muzzled by imprinted principles, nevertheless at its own time triumphing over all precepts, again rushes back to its inborn qualities.”

So there were few marriages and little mingling of Dutch and Hottentots. As I have said, you find the Hottentot strain in the country, and a white strain may appear in the same person. It seems that the white strain was imparted largely by people of colour, the half-castes and others who escaped from slavery and found their way to the Hottentot tribes living far away in the hinterland.

Once the slaves arrived at the Cape there was a very different picture. Some were repulsive as the Hottentots – negresses from Angola and the Gulf of Guinea; Swahilis from East Africa; black women from Madagascar. But there were also light-skinned Malay girls and other genuine Eastern beauties. Mauritius contributed women of mixed blood, slim and pretty as paintings. In an outpost where a white woman was still a rarity, the

inevitable happened. Search the records of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church and you will find marriage after marriage between Dutch, German, French and Portuguese men and the various types of purely Eastern or half-caste women. Soon after the British occupation you find the British names. This was no matter of nationality – it was propinquity.

All through the centuries, however, the slaves also bred among themselves. It is most important to remember that sections of the Cape coloured people have no white blood whatever. For example, many Malay families held aloof for religious and other reasons; and a part of the Malay community has remained racially pure. After all these years Javanese and Amboyna types may still be traced. Perhaps that is why the Malays are sometimes called “the aristocrats of the Cape coloured people”.

Then again you find dark Cape coloured people composed, no doubt, of negro and Eastern stock; dark people without a white ancestor. There are not many family trees to be found in coloured Cape Town. The origins are lost, the faces are bewildering as mixtures must be.

White blood, however, has played a large part in the creation of the class of nearly a million people in the Union officially classed as Cape coloured people. It is too obvious to be avoided, and all the government commissions

and select committees which have investigated the problem have recorded this solemn historical fact.

There are many sides to the tragedy of colour. Nearly all the Cape coloured people must experience the economic handicap, the lack of opportunity and lower standard of living. But the most dramatic aspect of the tragedy, the material of the novelist and playwright (here and overseas) is the social handicap. Some consolation may be found in the fact that this affects only a section of the people – the light-coloured section.

By this time a definition of a coloured person has become desirable. It is clear that a stage is reached when a person with some coloured blood in his make-up ceases to be a coloured person. But this is the point where the finest legal brains have failed. No one has yet devised a satisfactory general definition. When dealing with individuals you can be certain in some cases, most uncertain in others. A sadist might have the delightful experience of pointing the finger of scorn in all sorts of likely and unlikely places. If such a monster cares to study recent Union Government publications – I am thinking especially of Dr. J. Hoge's classic work on the old German settlers at the Cape – he will be able to denounce many people who have lost all visible trace of their coloured ancestors. It is a queer thought that while

wave after wave of white immigration helped to swell the coloured population, those waves also restored to the white community many families which, in the eighteenth century, had coloured members – coloured at a glance and beyond a doubt.

Colour in certain old Cape families goes so far back that some of the descendants admit it frankly. Here is the most striking example I have been able to find, a letter written under a penname to a Cape Town newspaper during a recent controversy over mixed marriages: “It is an established fact that even the beloved Governor Simon van der Stel could not claim to be of pure European blood. There were many others. One naturally refrains from mentioning names, as that would be mud-raking; but while making certain researches I came across many of these recorded marriages. I may mention that in the late 1600s there were four very beautiful young ladies at the Cape. Their widowed mother lived in Strand Street. She was born in Mauritius and was of mixed blood. These four daughters married well-known Dutch officials. Their descendants are of prominence today. One of these daughters was my original South African ancestress – and we are proud of her, too.”

Advocate George Findlay, K.C., of Pretoria, in his pamphlet on "Miscegenation", worked out a theory that one-third of those classed in the Union Census reports as Europeans have some coloured ancestry. Allowing for the exaggeration common to theorists, there is no doubt that Mr. Findlay is right to the extent that many thousands of people who tell census enumerators that they are white are, in fact, borderline cases.

Mr. Findlay declares that nearly all coloured people who are three-quarters white succeed in "escaping"; many half-castes are able to pass; and he has known some who were only one-quarter white who crossed with varying degrees of success.

So how are we going to define a Cape coloured person? One learned judge put it this way: "When once it has been established that one of a man's nearer ancestors, male or female, was black like a negro or yellow like a Bushman or Hottentot or Chinese, he is regarded as being of other than European descent."

That does not take us very far, though it was an Appellate Division ruling in 1911. Every definition since then has been hopelessly vague and bewildering. Take a walk through District Six and you will be able to say

with truth: “These people are coloured.” Outside that area you will be constantly at a loss.

Yet I am tempted to give a practical definition of a Cape coloured person in the light of modern thought. It is now conceded, even by fanatical race purists, that a slight mixture of coloured blood does not make a coloured person. Moreover, a person's associates come into the legal picture nowadays. If he has white friends, if he attended a white school or received treatment in a white hospital, that may tip the scale in his favour, deeply pigmented though he may be. So I am bold enough to define a coloured person as one who has failed to pass as a white person.

In the United States they call it “crossing the line”. The phrase in Cape Town is “trying for white”. It is done on a far wider scale than most people imagine, and there are probably more attempts today than ever before – for obvious reasons. At this period in the history of the Cape the white status is more valuable than ever it has been.

“Trying for white” – a desperate, pathetic struggle it must be, for even success can give no lasting security or immunity from insult. Success, moreover, carries its own penalties. It means, often enough, the loss of family and friends. All the dark-skinned ones must be left behind, passed in

the street without a word of greeting. They have a phrase for this, too. “Venster kies” – choosing the window. That is the fate of the successful ones, to gaze intently into shop-windows while darker-skinned brothers and sisters go by. There is a conspiracy of silence in these matters, and resentment is seldom felt by those who are left behind. All know the importance of being white.

Often enough, of course, the person who is “trying for white” leaves Cape Town for Johannesburg, where it is much easier to “cross the line”. One expects to find natives in Johannesburg, not coloured people. Suspicions are not aroused so easily. Family connections cannot be traced. The coloured people themselves have an unerring eye for colour, wherever it may be; and the coloured person who has “escaped” feels safer in a city remote from his past.

How many have thus “escaped”, even without leaving Cape Town, will never be known and no system of identity-cards will give the total. It is as well, perhaps, that even the new laws have left huge loop-holes. A strict classification of white and coloured, carried to the limit, would throw many State and private enterprises out of gear. I recall a threat made by a coloured leader at a meeting in Cape Town. “There are many coloured people passing as white,” he said. “We have drawn up a

list of such people in high places, and if the Government proceeds with apartheid, it will be published.”

Colour is almost everywhere in Cape Town, as I said in the beginning. I remember a speech by Mr. W. H. Stuart, M.P., during the mixed marriages debate in the House of Assembly. Mr. Stuart is a member of a family which arrived at the Cape in 1806. He is an authority on coloured missions, the legal problems arising out of colour, and the tests by which some people of coloured ancestry may be recognized. During the debate Mr. Stuart declared: “I know what are supposed to be coloured people. For instance, I have seen in this House four people being given tea in the last month or two who were, to my mind, 'obviously' coloured people. They were ladies, all four, and I am perfectly certain that the Government gentlemen who were squiring them and who were members of this House were not aware of the fact that they were coloured people. But it was quite obvious to me that they were by the various stigmata which were clearly visible.”

What are these “stigmata” by which a person of colour may be recognized? Mr. Stuart rejected the finger-nail test, as the fashionable red varnish obscured the “moons”. Curly hair might reveal Hottentot or Bantu blood, but not Indian or Malay blood. Yet there is one test which Mr. Stuart regards as decisive, and here it is in his own words: “It is the eyelid test. When a person closes his eyelid under

ordinary conditions the colour is continuous and uniform. With a dark person it may be a sunburnt colour and there may be all sorts of variations, but so long as it is continuous and uniform there is nothing to indicate coloured blood. But if the eyelid is rather startlingly white, that is one of the stigmata. I used to test people by dropping something and their eyes would look downwards – and then you knew where you were. The eyelid is the only place that goes white; the others are all discoloured.”

Scientists have no laboratory test for colour. They can tell whether a man has alcohol in his system, but the fixing of the amount of coloured blood is beyond them. The scientist, however, is prepared to defend mixed marriages up to a point. He says there is no biological reason why the children of mixed marriages should be any better or any worse than those of pure marriages. But he admits that such marriages may fail in a hostile atmosphere.

It is the hostile atmosphere, of course, that turns life into a daily ordeal for some who are “trying for white”. These are hidden sorrows, but Cape Town has not forgotten one tragedy that came to the surface a few years ago when a boy of sixteen hanged himself in his Observatory home.

This boy Billy had six brothers and sisters who attended White schools. Billy, the only dark member of the family, was turned down. He was warned away from the

Woodstock swimming-baths, rebuffed at bioscopes. Billy found a refuge in music. At fourteen he was an accomplished pianist, and people stood in the street to listen while he played Beethoven sonatas. He spent his pocket money on musical magazines and the lives of great composers.

Often he wandered on Table Mountain, and during a difficult climb one day he slipped and nearly lost his life. This appears to have influenced him, and shown him a way out of the misery that even his music could not overcome.

“The colour question was always on the boy's mind”, said his mother at the inquest. “He often talked about it, and it made him very unhappy.”

That was an extreme case, a sad illustration indeed of the motives that impel those who can to “cross the line”. Billy was a “throw-back”. As the late Dr. T. W. B. Osborn pointed out during the mixed marriages debate: “That is a tragedy all of us risk, especially the families who have been in the country the longest.” A point which may not be generally realized, however, is that such an inheritance works both ways. There are children, “obviously white” in appearance, attending coloured schools because they have coloured parents. The time will come when such children will “cross the line”.

To quote the late Dr. Osborn again: “It pays handsomely to be white, from the moment you are born until the moment you die. You get better schooling; you can

go to the city; you can sit anywhere you like on transport; you get a better job; you can bring up your family decently in a civilized way; you get the vote; you can control your destiny.”

Now come to District Six, home of about forty thousand of the Cape coloured people. You will not encounter many borderline faces in Hanover Street or elsewhere in this area. They have gone. That, incidentally, is the experience of investigators in all definitely coloured areas; that is the proof, if proof is needed, that thousands upon thousands have “crossed the line”. You do not find many lightly-coloured people in coloured areas.

District Six, by the way, is an obsolete name which has remained so firmly in so many memories that it cannot be changed. It was defined as far back as 1867, when Cape Town was split up into six districts. District Six was the southern district, running from Table Bay to the Devil's Peak slopes, from the edge of the business area to Trafalgar Park. A new arrangement was made in 1909, when the six districts were replaced by eight wards, and Castle Ward covered most of the former District Six. No one outside the City Council, however, speaks of Castle Ward. It is still the District Six of dubious legend, one Cape Town suburb known in the seaports of the world.

Once this dreaded district was a respectable middle-class European suburb – like Harlem in New York. Many lovely eighteenth-century houses have survived; lovely from the outside, at least, with their old fanlights. Soon after the abolition of slavery, Cape Town's more prosperous coloured artisans began to move in. Until about forty years ago most of Cape Town's skilled artisans were coloured men. There were many more coloured landowners, too, and coloured owners of small businesses. But for most of this century the coloured man has been fighting a losing battle in the economic field. District Six has become more and more overcrowded. And with the gradual disappearance of honest, well-paid work have come more and more shebeens and brothels, Fah Fee runners and dagga peddlers, more and more “skolly” gangs. All over District Six there are respectable families living in clean houses, but their efforts to maintain decent standards is the hardest of all struggles.

Many old coloured people, especially Malays, still refer to District Six as “Kanaladorp” – a name with a story. There is a strong camaraderie among the Malays, and when one builds a house he calls on the craftsmen among his friends to help him. This is called “Kanalawerk”, or work done to please a friend. (“Kanala” is the Malay word for “please”.) So many houses were built in District Six on this charming system that the area became known as Kanaladorp.

Coloured Cape Town has its own class distinctions, a complex society as baffling to the newcomer as caste-ridden India. First you have a few thousand coloured teachers and the skilled artisans who have clung precariously to that status. Some of them (according to a 1937 Government commission report) “may, in fact, be superior economically and socially to many a European”, though they have not all been able to rid themselves entirely of feelings of inferiority.

In the coloured middle-class you find the hard-working factory hands, unskilled labourers and domestic servants. Whatever the white people of Cape Town may know about the coloured people usually comes from this class – especially the cooks.

Lowest class of all are the bare-footed, drunken “skollies”, the gaolbirds and loafers, people of both sexes who would be surprised if you suggested that there was any stigma attaching to free board and lodging in Roeland Street.

But these three main groups are not all. Coloured Cape Town also has its physical appearance groups (light or dark, straight hair or peppercorn hair); its church groups, with most of the Malays as a race apart; and several geographical groups.

A model coloured group, of impeccable behaviour, is formed by the St. Helena people. There are more than two hundred of them, and they have their own social club. These St. Helenians in exile have also banded themselves together to provide legal and medical aid for members. At one time another far island, Tristan da Cunha, had its little colony of exiles in Cape Town, and I knew some remarkable characters among them. I do not know whether this held together after the passing of the old people born on the island.

Apart from these groups, there is not much unity in coloured Cape Town, and nothing has ever happened to encourage racial pride. Few leaders have emerged to inspire them. Such are the legacies of slavery.

It was at midnight on November 30, 1834, that the ancestors of these people heard the Signal Hill cannon and the church bells sounding the end of slavery. Cape Town had expected a night of drunken rioting. Instead, midnight found the coloured people kneeling in prayer, and in tears, in their churches. What has freedom given them, and where will the end of a second century of freedom find them?

I HAVE spoken of the material which novelists and dramatists have found in the half-world of the half-caste. Yet the strangest tale of all has never been told. At a time when marriage between European and coloured has become a criminal offence, the story of the Reverend Harry Grey (afterwards the 8th Earl of Stamford) and Martha Solomon (or Simons) sounds like a fantastic echo. These two people would never have been married if a minister had not persuaded the dissolute Harry Grey “to make an honest woman” of his coloured mistress. I am telling the story now in the knowledge that the last child of the marriage is dead. The scandal of Cape society seventy years ago has become history.

Harry Grey was a descendant of the royal and gentle Lady Jane Grey, executed in the reign of Queen Mary. On the warrant of execution of Charles I appeared the signature of Lord Grey. In different ways the family have been prominent in English history for hundreds of years, for the title was created in 1608.

Harry Grey followed his father into the Church. He once wrote of his father as a “clergyman of high culture and deep piety”. For years Harry Grey led the ordinary life of a Church of England parson in the quiet English

countryside, and it seemed most unlikely that he would ever succeed to the title.

At the age of thirty-two, in 1844, Harry Grey married Susan Gaydon in Devon. They had no children. Eleven years later they separated, and soon afterwards Grey sailed for the Cape. He had taken to drink, and his relations had shipped him off as a remittance man. Sometime after his arrival in 1855, Harry Grey took as his mistress a European woman, and they had a daughter.

Grey's wife died in 1869, and in 1872 Grey married a Miss Annie Macnamara at St. John's Church, Wynberg. His second wife is a vague figure, but the marriage certificate reveals that the bride made her mark instead of signing her name. She died in 1874, at the age of thirty-seven. Again there were no children. Two months before the death of the second Mrs. Grey a coloured servant named Martha Solomon entered the Grey household at Wynberg. She had never been married, but had lived with a man named Simons and had two grown-up sons by this man. Martha nursed Mrs. Grey until she died. She stayed on, became Grey's mistress, and in 1877 gave birth to a son John. Two years later a daughter Frances was born.

Harry Grey had departed so far from the religious life that he had not bothered to have his children baptized. The Rev. U. A. Strasheim of the Dutch Reformed Church, Wynberg, heard of this; and on June 20, 1880, both children were baptized by him.

Later that year Grey, now sixty-eight years of age, became seriously ill. The Rev. P. E. Faure of the Dutch Reformed Church at Wynberg urged him to marry Martha Solomon before it was too late. There were also the children to be considered. Under Roman-Dutch law (but not under the laws of England at that period) the marriage of the parents would render them legitimate. On December 6, 1880, after banns, Mr. Faure married Harry Grey to Martha Solomon in the Parsonage at Wynberg.

The elderly Grey was far from moribund, however, and before long he had made a complete recovery. The last child of Harry Grey was a legitimate daughter, Mary Grey, born on July 25, 1881. Two years later little Frances died during a smallpox epidemic. In that year Harry Grey (still the Rev. Harry Grey) became the Eighth Earl of Stamford. Instead of a small remittance, he inherited an income of about £8,000 a year from the estates in Lincolnshire and Cheshire.

So there he was in Wynberg with a white daughter in the early teens, a coloured son, a coloured daughter – and Martha. Up to that time it had been an obscure household. Now society at the Cape became aware of them – but not tolerant. Even an earl could not live down such a past.

The Earl of Stamford bought a large property in Constantia Road, Wynberg, and a house at Muizenberg called Stamford Villa. He also engaged as private secretary Mr. Edward John Moore, an attorney.

He sent his coloured daughter, now Lady Mary Grey, to school in Switzerland. The white daughter remained with him, and people were sorry for her – an illegitimate white girl with a coloured stepmother.

John Grey, who would have succeeded to the title but for the difference between Cape and English law, was admitted to a church school for white boys. With the thoughtless cruelty of youth his classmates called him the “Black Earl”.

No doubt there are still some who remember the Earl of Stamford and his ill-assorted family driving through the suburbs in a trap with two horses. I gather that he was eccentric in dress and manner. The Countess of Stamford did not share the Muizenberg villa with the rest of the family, but lived in a cottage (since pulled down) at the back.

That “clergyman of high culture and deep piety”, the Earl's father, had written his autobiography in 1857. The Earl had this work printed in Cape Town in 1888 – a belated tribute to a man who would have disapproved strongly of such a wayward son. The book is now a rare item of Africana.

The Earl of Stamford died at his Wynberg home on June 19, 1890. He was in good health a few days previously, but death was due to pneumonia.

In the obituary notice *The Cape Argus* remarked: “The Earl dispensed a great deal of charity unasked and unostentatiously.” *The Cape Times* stated: “The Earl was unostentatious and not in the habit of receiving visitors. On his arrival many years ago he was not prosperous, and the position he occupied was very different from that to which his early training had accustomed him. He received an allowance from a relative.”

The *Wynberg Times* mentioned that shortly before his death the Earl had been building houses for working and middle-class tenants. Lady Mary Grey, said this newspaper, was at school in England.

Reports of the funeral said that the coffin was placed in the family vault, beside Frances Grey, in Wynberg cemetery. Many tenants and workpeople from the Earl's estate were present.

In his will, made two years before his death, the Earl provided more or less equally for the three children, but left nothing to his wife. The Earl had saved money during the years since he had succeeded to the title, and he was also entitled to dispose of income inherited from his father, who had died in 1860.

Now arose the question of succession to the title. The claimant was Professor William Grey of Barbadoes, the late Earl's nephew. He had to petition the House of Lords to establish his claim, and in May, 1892, a committee heard the evidence.

The most important witnesses were Mr. Moore, the private secretary, and the Rev. F. B. Moore, rector of Constantia. Their expenses were paid, of course, and they took the essential documents, birth and marriage certificates, to London with them.

Both gave formal evidence. They also gave details of the late Earl's career already narrated. The Rev. F. B. Moore was asked: "Did the Earl ever make any statement to you with reference to his children, and to the inheritance of the Peerage?"

He replied: "Yes, a short time before his death he told me most emphatically: 'Of course none of my children can ever inherit it'."

Soon afterwards the House of Lords summoned Professor Grey to Parliament as the 9th Earl of Stamford.

Some years later, I am informed, the Old Cape House was debating a colour question when the late Mr. John X. Merriman referred to the Stamford affair in these words: "It was one of your own clergymen who induced a man belonging to one of the proudest families in England to marry a coloured woman."

A well-known Capetonian called at the Stamford home in Wynberg several years after the Earl's death, while the property was being surveyed. He told me that the Dowager Countess was the ordinary type of coloured domestic, and had never acquired any polish. *Debrett's Peerage* states that the Dowager Countess remarried in 1892. Her husband was Pieter Pieterse, a Wellington coloured man. She died in 1916.

The white daughter and the son John appear to have vanished without trace. Some years ago a London illustrated paper had a full-page portrait of Lady Mary Grey. *Kelly's Handbook to the Titled Classes* stated that Lady Mary Grey was married to an Englishman in 1917, and was divorced in 1930. She died in 1945.

Thus ended an unhappy family. Stamford Villa, on the main road at Muizenberg, still bears the name of the strange clergyman who escaped being unfrocked and became an earl. It is a queer reflection that if this man's

last child had been a boy, there would have been nothing to prevent a Cape coloured man from taking his seat in the House of Lords.

CHAPTER 22

IN THE MALAY QUARTER

THERE have been a few white Moslems at the Cape for more than a century, and some have married into the Malay community. One of the earliest white converts to Islam in Cape Town was a Scottish soldier, a namesake of Burns the poet. He married a Malay girl and their only child Abdol Burns, born in 1834, became one of the most influential men in the city during the last three decades of last century.

Abdol's parents died while he was an infant; but a family in whose service his mother had worked gave shelter to young Abdol and saw that he had a good education at St. Stephen's School. At fifteen Abdol was apprenticed to a saddler. He worked in Somerset West for a time and married a Moslem girl there, but returned to Cape Town when a depression in the country affected his living.

Then he bought a hansom-cab and prospered. He was a persuasive speaker, and his education helped him to become a political leader at a time when the solid "Malay vote" was a force in local politics. Before long no political meeting was complete without a speech from Abdol Burns, the olive-skinned cab-driver. He was a political disciple of that great parliamentary figure, Saul Solomon; but Burns remained a devout Moslem in spite of his early Christian upbringing.

Well-versed in colonial and world history, Abdol Burns supported the Empire League and acted as interpreter at Cape Town and district meetings. The welfare of the Malay community was his first concern, however, and he was a vigorous spokesman.

Abdol Burns suffered a setback during the riots of 1886 – probably the only occasion in the history of Cape Town when the Malays rose, in revolt. From the earliest days they had carried their dead, according to Moslem custom, to graves close to the Malay quarter. Their main cemetery was at the foot of Signal Hill. There came a time when Cape Town could no longer permit burials in the overcrowded Somerset Road cemeteries. Other religions agreed, more or less reluctantly, to the new Maitland sites; but the Malays refused.

A mass meeting of Malays was held in the old Town House with Abdol Burns in the chair. Burns pointed out that his community had no objection to the closing of the graveyards, but that they needed a new burial ground within easy walking distance of their homes. Their religion demanded that the corpse should be carried on their shoulders from the death-bed to the grave.

No solution of the problem had been found when the last day arrived for burials in the old town cemeteries. Abdol Burns conducted a party of

officials to a burial ground selected by the Malays above the quarries on Signal Hill, but the Medical Board reported against it. The Malays declared openly that they would defy the law.

One day passed without a single death in the Malay Community. Then came the Sunday afternoon of January 17, when Cape Town suddenly became aware of an irregular vanguard of urchins followed by thousands of Malays. A Malay child had died, and the Malays were on the march to their traditional burial ground. There were so many of them that Darling Street was filled with the oncoming funeral procession.

Police arrived while the child was being buried. By this time the law-abiding Malays had become fanatics. Stones were thrown from stoeps and windows, the police retreated and were pursued and besieged in the police station. Among those injured was Mr. Charles Fowler, a pioneer news photographer. A second Malay funeral took place that afternoon, but the police decided not to intervene until they had been reinforced.

By this time Cape Town was thoroughly alarmed. Two companies of the Royal Scots were held in readiness at the barracks. All the volunteer units were called out – Prince Albert's Own Volunteer Artillery and cavalry, the Dukes, Highlanders and Cape Town Irish Volunteer Rifles. This impressive

force waited in vain for Malay funerals. It appears that the Malays were quietly burying their dead at night beyond the municipal limits.

Six Malay priests interviewed Mr. Thomas Upington, the Prime Minister, who promised to see what he could do. Abdol Burns went to Sir Gordon Sprigg and announced: "My people will not go to Maitland. I cannot answer for their actions."

Shortly afterwards Abdol Burns appeared before the magistrate charged with assaulting a police sergeant by throwing stones during the Sunday afternoon riots. He was fined £10. This was his only clash with the law. Finally the Malays were granted a burial ground within walking distance of their homes.

Abdol Burns remained active until a year or two before his death in June, 1898. In an obituary notice, *The Cape Argus* said: "His speeches contained more solid sense than those of many persons better placed in life. His one mistake was in leading the Moslem riots when Cape Town was startled to find that it might have to deal with oriental fanaticism in the mass. Abdol Burns would have kept quiet if he could, but then he would have forfeited his position and influence."

LEADER OF the Malays, and champion of the whole Cape coloured community this century was Dr. A. Abdurahman. You can trace his ancestry back to 1861, when Lady Duff Gordon made friends with Abdul Jamaalee and his wife Betty, both ex-slaves.

This couple kept a shop in Roeland Street with “Betsy, fruiterer” painted outside. They gave Lady Duff Gordon herb tea for her cough. “I declined it at first,” she wrote, “and the poor old man looked hurt and gravely assured me that it was not true that Malays always poisoned Christians, and drank some himself. It certainly did me good, though it is intensely bitter and rather sticky.”

Old Jamaalee confided to Lady Duff Gordon that he had made £5,000 and sent his son, Abdul Rachman, to Cairo and Mecca to study theology. On his return Abdul Rachman married Kadija Dollie, reputed to be the prettiest Malay girl in Cape Town. Such were the parents of the Malay doctor who was to make history for the Cape coloured people.

They sent their son Abdurahman to Glasgow University. As a student he met a Glasgow solicitor, Mr. John Cumming James, one of the men who secured free and compulsory education for Scottish children. In the home of the James family Abdurahman met their daughter Helen; and when he

graduated in medicine in 1895 he married her and brought her back to Cape Town. He had warned her that life would not be easy, but this was one of the mixed marriages which was successful.

Dr. Abdurahman was the second Cape coloured man to qualify in medicine, and the first to enter the City Council and Provincial Council. It was said of him that he combined the ancient wisdom of the Malays with the science of the Christians. Both as a politician and as a doctor he inspired confidence. Certainly he was the greatest leader the coloured people had ever known. He was also a friend of Gandhi, who always stayed with the Abdurahmans when he was in Cape Town.

Dr. Abdurahman's funeral in 1940 was the largest Malay funeral of the century. All the way from his home in Kloof Street to the Moslem cemetery at Mowbray the body was carried by hundreds of Malay bearers – each one taking the trestles for a few seconds so that others might share the privilege. The cars stretched for a mile. All other traffic along the route stopped for hours.

WHOLE TERRACES in the Malay Quarter⁷ of Cape Town were transformed not long ago. Old houses have shaken off their poverty and regained their character. Green-painted casement windows and the pink walls of the past have been restored. Mosques and palms, fig-trees and fruit barrows, the bright clothing of the Malays themselves, have always made this Eastern corner of Cape Town memorable. But now there are houses where you do not have to rely on moonlight to soften the squalor. Families selected to move into the renovated houses were all Malays steeped in the traditions of the quarter. One day the slum may become a show-place.

The Malay Quarter ... small, open stoeps, goats and fowls and narrow lanes. Twisted, ancient almond trees in Almonda Street. Snoek hanging from massive vines. Washing on pomegranate trees. Ancient kists and blackened copper kettles. Packed houses, step after step of them, and overcrowded humanity. All through the quarter, the sound of wooden sandals on cobblestones. *Salaam Alaikoem!*

During the restoration of the houses the builders discovered many copper coins below the flooring boards. To this day some Malays believe that it is

⁷ Other phases of Malay life are included in Lawrence Green's *So Few Are Free* and *Tavern of the Seas*.

lucky to drop a coin found in the street through the floor. Hence these pennies bearing the profiles of William IV and George III, and other British, Dutch and Portuguese coins.

How old is the Malay Quarter? This is a puzzle which has baffled architects. Though the first Malays were brought to Cape Town in the seventeenth century, few had homes of their own and certainly there was no Malay Quarter. Pictures of the Signal Hill slopes painted early last century show fields and farms where the alleyways and mosques stand today. Barrow's book, however, published in 1804, has a scene proving that a few small terraces of typical houses, now occupied by Malays, stood there at that period.

Nevertheless, it seems that the Malay Quarter became the home of the Malays only after the emancipation of the slaves. Before that, white people lived in those little homes and wealthier white people had larger houses there. Rose Street could never have been built by the Malays, for the houses were once impressive and old maps indicate that each house had a large garden. There is a theory that the Malay gardeners remained on and founded the Malay Quarter after their masters had moved out.

Though the Malays have dominated the Signal Hill slopes for more than a century, there were still a number of white artisans and shopkeepers living in Rose Street when my 1867 street directory was published. Rittmuller and several other carpenters were there, and the presence of three inns suggests customers other than the abstemious Malays. Similarly there were more white people than Malays in Chiappini Street at that period; though Abdol Wahab the priest was in residence and Malay names were plentiful enough.

A mosque was built in Chiapinni Street soon after the middle of last century, and this may have been Cape Town's first mosque. Until then, the Malays gathered for prayer in the stone quarries on the mountainside or in private houses. Their religion was not forbidden, but the Dutch East India Company allowed only the Dutch Reformed Church to build places of worship.

General Janssens granted a request from the Malays to build a mosque and Theal asserted that the first minaret rose above the flat roofs of Cape Town early in the nineteenth century. Later historians questioned the Malays on this point and failed to discover even a legend of this building. It appears that they had to wait almost two centuries for a mosque.

Among those buried in the Chiappini Street mosque was Abdol Bazier, a priest who unwisely dabbled in witchcraft. He died in jail where he had been sent for selling charms to a coach-driver who had robbed the mail-bags.

First pilgrim from the Cape to Mecca was a priest named Carel. He set out in 1855 establishing a tradition which thousands of Cape Malays have followed since then.

Many a religious controversy has unsettled the Malay Quarter in the past. Once the community almost split on the question of crawfish – clean or unclean? There are still Malay fishermen who will not eat the crawfish they catch. Then a thirsty Malay pointed out that the Prophet made no mention of beer in the Koran, though certain alcoholic liquors were banned. “They consume Cape ale to an extent that would astonish a London drayman,” wrote a visitor to the quarter.

Malay was still a spoken language in Cape Town at the middle of last century, but it was dying out. About 150 Malay words, however, remained in the Afrikaans spoken by the Malays, and some are more widely used – such words as *atjar*, *blatjang* and *katel*. Arabic, of course, is the language strict Malays insist on their children learning, and you can find boys of ten able to recite a whole chapter of the Koran in Arabic. It is a ceremony, followed by one of the many feasts of the Malay Quarter.

Ramadan is the fast that ends with the greatest feast of all. Ramadan, and the Malay elders kneeling on the sand at the edge of Table Bay, salaaming before the thin sickle of the new moon. Ramadan, the month when the prophet received his first revelation, observed by the Malays of Cape Town and all orthodox Moslems for centuries. Ramadan, when the muezzin steps on to the minaret at the end of the fast, cries “Allaho Akobar!” and places a date in his mouth. “Fast when you see the moon, and eat again when you see it the second time,” says the Koran. Though epidemics have taken heavy toll of the Malays, they have had their centenarians. One named Hadji Gabriel drew his pension of £5 a month from the Cape Town municipality for 40 years. He was in the waterworks department at a time when Cape Town had only ten municipal officials.

I remember, too, a woman known as “Ouma Gaartjie”, who died in her hundredth year shortly before the Second World War. Sister of an imam, she was an authority on Moslem ritual; and at Malay weddings she saw that the young people observed the old customs. There was also an incredibly wizened man, Gariel Hendricks, who told me in 1938 that he had attended the feast on the Parade when Queen Victoria came to the throne.

Malays have always favoured the newspaper trade, and not long ago a woman, Jogera Toffar, financed her pilgrimage to Mecca on the £400 she had saved while

selling newspapers at the foot of the Avenue. I have heard of a Malay boy in his teens saving £300 for the same purpose. Towards the end of last century the king of Cape Town's newsboys was a Malay named Saban. He was so huge that the newsboys nicknamed him Olifant – a legendary figure indeed.

Cape Town is ringed in with Malay tombs, the kramats which protect all within the circle from flood or famine. One stands on Signal Hill, close to the Malay Quarter. It is the tomb of Towang Guru, exiled from Malaya early last century, a holy man who knew the whole Koran by heart and wrote the Book for the Malays of Cape Town. His descendants still live in the quarter.

On the edge of the Signal Hill quarry is the grave of Hadji Shahmohammed, a much earlier exile, noted for his magical powers. He could walk through locked doors at night to convert slaves to Islam. This was the man who prophesied that one day there would be a ring of kramats, the “Circle of Islam”, round the town.

Another grave where oils are poured and silks wrapped round the stones is that of Tuan Skaapie, a Malay of last century who had a strange influence over animals. He was a hermit, and spent his life caring for sick animals, followed everywhere by the pet sheep that gave him his nickname.

The Malay Quarter ... sunshine and gleaming harness, cross-legged tailors and clever carpenters, red fezzes and vivid dresses. When you lose sight of the

mountain there is something of Cairo about it. Yet the Malay Quarter makes the most romantic foreground for any view of Cape Town, and you have not seen Table Bay at all until you have glimpsed the blue curve through the pink and cream and yellow houses of the quarter.

TWO OLD corners of Malay Cape Town which I visited recently taught me something about Malay craftsmen and Malay fashions in headgear and footwear.

First the fez. Only this century has the fez become the universal head covering of the Cape Malays. For centuries the Malays wore red handkerchiefs or small crimson turbans; and in hot weather they added the “toering” or conical straw hat.

Certain holy men from Turkey arrived in Cape Town in the 'sixties of last century to find out whether Moslem customs were being properly observed in this far outpost of Islam. They advised the Malays to wear the fez because it allowed them to keep their heads covered at prayers and yet touch the ground with their foreheads. Half a century passed before this religious fashion became firmly established in slow-moving Cape Town. Since then, Turkey has abolished the fez (or tarbush as it is called there) and Moslem authorities have declared that true believers are not bound to wear the fez. Having adopted the fez, however, the Cape Malays cling to it.

The fez, of course, is not really an oriental cap at all. It first appeared in Austria, and the royal bodyguard in Athens wore it long before the Turks decided to abandon their turbans and take to the fez. Cape Malays call the fez a “kofija”. Until shortly before World War II fezzes were imported from Cairo. Then Hadji Jassiem had an idea.

Hadji Jassiem is a Cape Malay who studied at Al Azhar religious university in Cairo in his youth for eight years. He returned to Cairo in 1938, studied the craft of fez making, bought blocks and presses, and set up this plant in Cape Town just about the time when it became impossible to secure Egyptian fezzes.

Naturally this enterprise flourished. Hadji Jassiem took me round his busy rooms in Leeuwen Street the other day and showed me the types of fezzes worn in Cape Town. The familiar red fez is the most popular, though a brownish-crimson shade has its devotees. Others prefer a black fez. Light grey fezzes worn in Durban are not in demand here. While the fez colour is purely a matter of personal taste, only a hadji – a man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca – is permitted by custom to wear the black tassel.

Hadji Jassiem has a magnificent red, white, yellow and black chequerboard pattern fez which he bought in Mecca. This is a type of fez worn only while returning from the pilgrimage, in the mosque, and on other special occasions. He also

possesses a red fez with white turban and blue tassel – the mark of a learned Moslem who has qualified (as Hadji Jassiem has done) at Al Azhar.

Nowadays a fez costs from 13s. to £1 and lasts six months to a year. Thrifty Malays cover their fezzes with waterproof material in rainy weather; for rattan linings are no longer procurable and a wet fez soon loses its shape.

Almost every Malay who can afford it buys a new fez at the end of Ramadan. Those are hectic days in Leeuwen Street, and the demand shoots up to thirty times above normal.

Another corner of Cape Town where Malay craftsmen are to be found is the legendary *kreefgat* – a tiny cellar in Shortmarket Street. Cobblers have been at work in this dim recess for more than a century. It gained the nickname of *kreefgat* because the regular spectacle of a group of wise and aged Malays discussing their problems down in the cellar reminded some disrespectful humorist of a cluster of crawfish among the dark seaweed.

Long ago the priests and hadjis of the Malay quarter held interminable discussions and made vital decisions in that cellar. The shoemakers went on with their work and talked as they hammered. They made *madasters*, the sandals worn on the pilgrimage, and everyday *klompers* with wooden soles and leather tips. Later on came “sidesprings” – boots with elastic sides for smart Malays. European

customers with difficult feet were measured in the cellar, and the whole shoe was made there.

Hadji Malie Cariem, the present owner of the business, told me that his uncle had worked in the cellar for sixty years. It was the resort of the sort of Malays “who lived with their religion”. If the tomb of a holy man was in danger, if a wedding had to be arranged or some point of ritual settled, this was the final court.

News of the Malay community passed rapidly to the *kreefgat*. It was a clearing-house for news, and any Malay who gave the *kreefgat* as his authority knew that he would be believed.

Hadji Cariem told me that early this century Long Street was “all half-doors and Malays”. The old building which shelters the *kreefgat*, at the corner of Long and Shortmarket Streets, was sold for £700 last century. His uncle could have bought it at that time, but now it was worth £20,000. Strict Moslems look upon money earning interest as usury. So husbands worked hard, wives took in washing, and they paid cash for their homes. There was a time when a small Malay house cost only £150, but many a home had to be sold to pay for the Mecca pilgrimage.

Such matters were brought to the *kreefgat* and solemn advice was given by the imams and elders siting in a row on a bench opposite the cobblers. Today the

pilgrimage cost £400, and some Malays fly to Jeddah. But the old councillors of the *kreefgat* could never have imagined changes like that.

Once the *kreefgat* was lit by candles, and the cobblers drew water from a well in the yard. The cellar has carved teak beams which may have come from a ship. It is a queer place indeed to find opposite one of Cape Town's largest modern buildings – the *kreefgat* of the Malay cobblers.

CHAPTER 23

THE COONS MARCH AT MIDNIGHT

WALE STREET is a river of colour and melody as troupe after capering troupe of coons flood the old thoroughfare with their banjos, tambourines and guitars. Once again Cape Town is watching the traditional New Year carnival, gay as any Rio festa or Mardi Gras of New Orleans.

Each troupe has its *voorloper*, a prancing drum-major swinging the staff of office and leading the musicians. Farther back is the elaborate symbol bearing the name of the troupe – Cape Town Hawkers, Dixiana Jazz Singers, Grand Parade Minstrels or Manhattan Coons.

Coon troupes are growing with the years. They are crowding down the street in mass formation, and the Hollywood Serenaders alone are four hundred strong. Four hundred boys and men, caught up in the joy of New Year and the rhythm of the moment. This is their song:

*So ry ons met die trein na Bloemfontein,
En so drink ons van Napoleon se wyn,
My hartjie, myn liefjie, adieu vaarwel!
Napoleon se vlag die waai!*

Sometimes it is difficult to make sense of these *liedjies*, but there is no need to be rational on a day like this.

This is the place to watch the coons, in the sunlit street. Here their singing blends with the background of old, white-fronted houses. Here they forget the imported American acts of their concerts and give you *moppies* in Afrikaans, their own Cape *liedjies*. Here the whole show is spontaneous and happy. On a concert platform, however, the sentimental coon prefers to harrow the feelings of his audience with something like this:

*Nellie was a lady
Last night she died,
Toll the bell for lovely Nell,
My dark Virginian bride.*

Coon troupes in carnival dress have been entertaining Cape Town every New Year's Day without a break for more than sixty years. I have seen an ingenious theory of a much earlier origin, and according to this story the troupes were started by American negro slaves who escaped from ships in Table Bay and merged with the coloured population on shore. This does not appeal to me, for I have still to find any record of an American ship with a slave crew calling at the "Tavern of the Seas". The most frequent American visitors last

century were the whalers, and they came from Northern states which were opposed to slavery.

The origin which appears to be authentic is based on the visit of an American negro minstrel troupe to Cape Town during 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. Their bright costumes and coon songs made an irresistible appeal to the music-loving coloured people. Among those who heard the minstrels and memorized their songs were some Malay singers, members of the Dantu family. Their descendants claim that the Dantus started the coons, and that the first troupes appeared on January 1, 1888, wearing the American minstrel costumes and with the blackened faces seen to this day.

Mr. C. J. Cole, a Cape Town baker, has been credited with bringing the coons to life. With an eye on publicity, Mr. Cole provided his bakery boys with top hats and costumes and followed the troupe in his trap. But that, I find, was six years after the first appearance of the coons.

Those early coons sang and danced without thought of reward. In 1906, however, *The Cape Argus* offered a trophy and organized the first Green Point Track carnival. That event has now become a coon tradition. There are

so many troupes that Rosebank and Athlone have become the scenes of rival gatherings of huge coon clans.

The art of the coon does not seem to have spread far beyond the Cape Flats. The coons belong to Cape Town. You will see them from Sea Point to Simonstown, but seldom in the platteland.

Some of the troupes appear for a few days at New Year and then vanish for ever. Others pride themselves on continuity. For more than half a century the Alabama Coons have danced in the streets and sung the Alabama song. Johnny Cavalla, founder of the Alabamas, is still fondly remembered as one of the famous coon leaders. So is Fatie Abrahams, who started that long-lived band of songsters, the Diamond Eyes. Then there was Gamat Longfield, who rode proudly at the head of the Cherry Pickers – shades of the Hussar regiment! – on that great day long ago when every coon in the troupe was mounted. A wonderful New Year indeed with coons in red breeches on horseback, carrying swords.

Nowadays there is keen business organization behind the carefree coons. No sooner has the last parade been held late in January than members of the coon clubs start paying in every week towards the brilliant satin costumes they will wear at the next New Year celebrations.

As early as August the clubs meet for song and dance rehearsals. Rules are strict, and the coon who has obviously called at a canteen on the way has to pay a fine of five shillings. He fears the club discipline more than the police, though he takes special care to observe the law as New Year approaches.

Late in the year some back-street tailor who specializes in the gorgeous coon raiment will receive a £500 order. Behind locked doors the garments will be fitted, with every coon blindfolded so that the secret of the pattern cannot be divulged. For up in the Malay quarter and in all the coloured streets of the city these costumes are awaited as eagerly as any Paris fashion show; and just as jealously are the new designs guarded.

In those streets on New Year's Eve only the infants and the invalids are in bed. Everyone else waits for the spectacular event of the year. The coons march at midnight!

They march from midnight to dawn, serenading the families of their members. Yet they remain fresh enough to march twenty miles in daylight on New Year's Day. Most troupes have first, second and third captains, identified by their rosettes; so that although casualties may occur, the coons march on. Walking sticks and sunshades are part of the outfit. Down to the

tinest child, there is complete uniformity in costume. Saxophones are creeping into the coon bands, but the traditional banjos, guitars and mandolins remain. Some musicians carry 'cellos slung over their shoulders and play with the instrument in that position.

Every year a Red Indian troupe brandishes its tomahawks. Known as “skinner”, they do not sing; they are wild dancers and young coloured children look upon them as bogymen. Some years ago the “skinner” took to stilts and gave daring shows in the busy streets. They had to be stopped in the interests of safety. Another coon contrast is found in the so-called “moffie” troupes of female impersonators. Their acting is so realistic that audiences are reduced to helpless, bewildered laughter. At concerts these strange people always arouse the screams of the evening.

Takings at coon concerts and open-air displays have mounted in recent years, but the individual coon is no highly-paid performer. All he expects is that his captain will invite him to a lavish *tafel* at the end of the celebrations – silver presentation cups filled with wine, tables loaded with everything from bredie to smoked snoek. The captain who fails to observe this pleasant custom, or who stints the refreshments, will whistle in vain for his coons later in the year.

MUCH OLDER than the coons, at least two centuries older, are the Malay choirs. Their music is more artistic, and they have preserved some of the earliest folk-songs of the Netherlands ever heard in Cape Town – a romantic survival.

*Al is ons Prinsje nog zoo klein,
En Hoezee!
Al evenwel zal hij stadhouder zyn,
En Hoezee!*

That song goes back to the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Dutch were struggling to maintain their independence against the French under the young Stadholder, later William III of England.

Dr. I. D. du Plessis, the author, poet and linguist, has been studying the Malays and their choirs for a quarter of a century. He is the spokesman and friend of the Malay community, and he has made dramatic discoveries in the field of research in which he is the leading authority.

No doubt the Malay choirs first assembled in the slave period, to pass the evenings when they were confined to their quarters after the nine o'clock

curfew. They sang to guitar music at weddings and picnics, with the *ghommas* beating out the rhythm. The *ghommas* are the queer little drums they brought from the East with them – hence the picnic songs in Afrikaans called *ghomma-liedjies*.

Another old Malay instrument, the “ra'king”, has a tin at one end with a sheep's bladder stretched over it, and four strings. The really skilful performer secures unusual effects by allowing the strings to rest against his beard. “Ra'king” comes from a Portuguese word, meaning “little violin”. It is seldom heard nowadays.

Dr. du Plessis has traced public appearances of these choirs back to New Year's Eve 1887 when the Star of Independence Malay Club held a torchlight procession. As a rule, however, they sang to amuse themselves, humble lovers of music keeping old songs alive. They took their art so seriously in the old days that dangerous arguments would arise about the true rendering of a song – and end with the flash of a kris.

Early this century there settled in the Malay quarter a sailor from Holland who was to have a profound influence on the choirs. He was Frans de Jong, he wore the fez and took a leading part in the singing. This made him thirsty but it is remembered in his favour that in deference to Moslem

susceptibilities he always removed his fez before reaching for the bottle. De Jong sent to Amsterdam for the song pamphlets used by street singers. In this way the Malays acquired many of the foreign songs which often puzzle the listener – the old Russian national anthem, for example, and the “Marseillaise”. Student songs in Latin came from the same source.

Among the pupils of De Jong was Rasdien Cornelius, greatest Malay singer of this century. “Though he could not read or write, he had memorized more than two hundred songs – some with eight or ten long verses,” Dr. du Plessis told me. “I have listened to Rasdien singing from two in the afternoon with hardly a break until ten at night. He lived to lead the Malay choir which sang, for the first time in Cape history, in 1934 at Government House.”

Rasdien, as leader of the choir, was known as the *lokomotief*. His tenor, or *klok*, was Johnny Willemborg. These two famous Malays started singing together in 1887. Both have passed on, but under the inspiration of De Jong they were largely responsible for the revival of the Malay choirs early this century.

Years ago the Malay choirs adopted fancy dress at New Year, like the coons. Once they were all “Dutch sailors”, while a more ambitious effort

was the “Napoleonic year”. Today they wear blazers or lounge suits cut in flashy styles. On the march they prefer felt hats to the fez. Here again there is complete uniformity, but the thrifty Malays are able to wear their carnival clothes when the festivities are over.

Malay choirs appear several hours before midnight on New Year's Eve. As a rule they leave most of the daylight hours to the coons and parade sedately at night. They pay their musicians at high rates. The symbols they carry, model ships or flower emblems, are often elaborate and are illuminated at night.

Only the *voorloper* of a Malay choir is permitted to cut occasional capers. All the others march like soldiers, with dignity and restraint. Through the darkness comes the cheeky humour of “Katotjie”, the Afrikaans ballad:

*Spreek Katotjie se moeder haar aan,
Ja, myn dogter watter skade jy gedaan
Ja, my moeder en laat my maar tog staan,
Al op die dans was my eer ontgaan.*

You hear the most typical Malay singing at wedding receptions. The mournful yet soothing bridal songs go back for generations. They are by far the most fascinating from the musical point of view, a blend of East and West, and not without

wisdom. It is a matter of mood, but for sheer hypnotic effect the most appealing of them is probably “Sal ik dan myn lief uitnoemen?” (Shall I name my love?)

So fond of singing were the old Malay fishermen of Rogge Bay that they rowed out to Dutch ships in the anchorage and offered bottles of Cape wine to any seamen who would teach them songs from the Netherlands they did not know. They also gave shelter to many a runaway Dutch sailor with the same object in view. Both coons and Malay choirs belong to the Cape and reflect many phases of Cape life and history in their songs. Long may they march past the old blue and pink houses and the high stoeps of Chiappini Street. Long may guitar and ghomma sound in the homes of Cape Town's own minstrels.

CHAPTER 24

PAPENDORP AND PAARDEN EILAND

SOME of the older residents remember Woodstock and Salt River as farming areas, with the sails of a windmill turning in Albert Road and a straggling line of houses with large gardens along the high road. In winter there was a swamp between the main road and the railway line. Cows were often bogged and lost in the morass of high grass and mud. It was a suburb of vineyards and vegetables.

I once came across a dramatic illustration of Woodstock's rapid growth. It was in the Kimberley "I.D.B." days, and a man escaped to Cape Town with a "parcel". He knew that the police were not far behind, so he buried his diamonds beneath a prominent tree near the Victoria Road. Convicted on another count, the "I.D.B." merchant served his term on the Breakwater secure in the knowledge that he had a nest-egg ready for his release. On that happy day, however, he found a street in Woodstock where his tree had stood. Someone is living over a parcel of diamonds said to be worth £20,000.

No one ever forgets that Woodstock was once called Papendorp, but I was shocked to find this explanation in the 1904 edition of the "Cape Town

Guide”: “In the days of Dutch intolerance Roman Catholics were compelled to reside at Papendorp. Time gradually healed the wounds caused by religious strife, and the place became a fishing village.”

That was absurd, but Papendorp baffled the experts on place names until a document found in the Archives revealed that in 1788 a Hollander named Pieter van Papendorp registered his house and erf between the Castle and Salt River for four thousand florins as security for a debt.

According to local legend, it was in Papendorp's old thatched house that the Cape was surrendered to the British on January 10, 1806. Lieut.-Colonel von Prophalow signed on behalf of the Dutch, while Major-General Baird and Commodore Home Popham were the British representatives. The thatched house (pulled down some years ago) was identified as the scene of the capitulation by old people who recalled the actual ceremony. It may not have been Papendorp's house; but the Old Treaty House, with rafted ceiling, stone-flagged floor and vine trained over the stoep, was certainly the place where the thirsty British troops formed up after the Battle of Blaauwberg. Leibbrandt the archivist confirmed the site early this century and wrote: “There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the Papendorp

tradition, as the event occurred so very near our own time and has never been questioned so far as I am aware.”

Treaty Street, Woodstock, commemorates the event, but I think they might have left the seventeenth-century cottage untouched.

Close by is an even more historic landmark, miraculously preserved. This is the gnarled melkbos tree known as the “old slave tree”. Near this spot, in 1509, d’Almeida and sixty-four of his Portuguese sailors were massacred by the Hottentots.

At the end of last century there still lived in Woodstock a coloured woman, Rachel Bester, who had seen the slave dealers proclaiming the qualities of their human goods under that tree. Slaves were hanged from the huge branches during Rachel Bester’s childhood. The tree has now been securely fenced to save it from the fate of another aged tree which was chopped up for firewood in recent years.

Another vanished landmark, the Toll Gate in Sir Lowry Road, was placed in 1812 where the tramway sheds now stand and perpetuate the name. Wagons paid six shillings, carts nine pence, and it cost two pence farthing to bring a sheep through the gate. Sometimes there was an argument, and the toll keeper dropped the bar and damaged the vehicle beneath. Fights were not

unknown, as the court records show. One night in 1856 the toll keeper had the temerity to stop a fire engine; and a police inspector riding to the fire was turned back because he could not find two pence to pay for his horse.

Not until August 15, 1901, was *The Cape Argus* able to announce with satisfaction the abolition of all toll-bars. "It was not so much the actual payment which people resented, though there was so much of the 'stand and deliver' tone about the demand, and it was sometimes distinctly offensive," commented *The Argus*. "What galled the progressive colonist was that he was literally barred from getting about his business in an age when most barriers go by the board."

Behind the tramway sheds is an area known as City Gates, and these gates with the Cape Town coat-of-arms are still to be found – one set in Prestwich Street and the other in a street off Sir Lowry Road.

Old Papendorp was not without characters. One who lived there in the first half of last century was Jan Greyling, whose nose was nearly six inches long. He declared that he was the Emperor Nero and certainly he fiddled and danced at every fire.

Papendorp had an inn called the King's Head as far back as 1821, but it was not until 1859 that a number of building lots were offered for sale “on the railway route which will go through this thriving centre”.

A meeting was held some years later to protest against the Cape Town municipality dumping its refuse and sewage at Papendorp.

In the early 'eighties came the movement to bring a number of estates into a new municipality – Papendorp, Altona, Roodebloem, Leliebloem and Salt River. At this period, too, the Papendorp residents decided to change the name of their suburb, and were asked to vote in favour of New Brighton or Woodstock. These were hotel names. The favourite pub of the fishermen was the Woodstock, and their votes won the day. Nevertheless, the railway station remained Papendorp until 1885. When the signboard was removed and the porters began calling out “Woodstock! Woodstock!” there was a counterblast of “Papendorp! Papendorp!” from the more conservative people on the platform.

The old Woodstock coat-of-arms depicted the wreck of *De Jonge Thomas* and Woltemade on his horse Prins. Woltemade's farm Malta was in the Papendorp area, and he had been out early delivering milk on the morning of the wreck.

The Cape Argus directory for 1889 defined the Woodstock municipal boundaries – “on the east by the village of Maitland, on the west by Cape Town, on the north by the sea and on the south by the slope of Devil's peak.” Old cannon cemented into certain pavements gave a more accurate idea of the Cape Town Woodstock frontier.

According to the directory, the only industry of any importance in Woodstock at that time was Mr. J. J. Atmore's mill⁸ and bakery. Coffee and reading rooms had been started in Albert Road “to draw youths from questionable places of resort”. The suburb had one doctor and a veterinary surgeon.

There have been English and Dutch Reformed Church schools in the suburb for more than a century. Here is a fragment of school history from a newspaper report of 1845: “The little village of Papendorp has been enlivened by the school fete and tea to the children of the English Church

⁸ In 1895 this Woodstock windmill came into the news unexpectedly. It was struck by lightning, and the sail splintered. On the ground floor the miller was carrying a sack of flour. The flash struck him in the stomach, travelled down and burst his boots open. He was left unconscious, and, for some time afterwards his legs were paralysed. The mill was set on fire.

School. The Bishop was present, and the band of the 73rd Regiment played at intervals. The children made a procession and carried banners of silk. Children and guests numbered about 250 persons.”

The old Treaty House was the home of the rector of St. Mary's Church for many years. When a chapel, St. Andrews, was opened in 1893 for the coloured people of Woodstock, the first congregation included a number of former slaves and also a group of beachcombers who made a living by collecting shell for the lime burning.

Bathing was a ludicrous business during most of last century. It was in 1821 that Mr. Henry Brest informed the ladies and gentlemen of Cape Town that he had secured the permission of the Governor and the Burgher Senate to place bathing-machines on Woodstock Beach. Mr. Brest's machines enabled women to bathe in ridiculous privacy. Fully-clad, they entered the machines on the beach. Horses drew these bathing-boxes on wheels into the water. Timidly the bathers emerged in their long-bloomered costumes; and a large canopy was drawn over the steps until they were up to their necks.

In the *Cape Town Gazette* four months later Mr. Brest announced that the bathing-machines he had built at considerable expense had not been well

patronized. He offered his services as storekeeper to any merchant in town, and bathing suffered a set-back.

It is strange to reflect that free-and-easy bathing customs have grown up within living memory. There have always been swimmers, but only within the past fifty years has swimming become respectable – something which a whole family and friends can enjoy without shame at the same time and place. Woodstock revived bathing machines in 1883. “The charge will be 6d. per bather,” reported *The Cape Argus*. “Machines will have all the comfort of a private bathroom. Bathing dress, drawers, towels and swimming cushions will be provided. It is hoped to make Woodstock beach compare favourably with Boulogne, Scarborough, Brighton and Folkstone.”

This ambitious scheme met with some success, and at the end of six months the Woodstock Sea Bathing Association declared a dividend of fifteen per cent. The railways issued cheap tickets to Woodstock, and all went well until the summer of 1887. Then a complaint appeared in *The Cape Argus*: “It is evident that the gentlemen's bathing machines are very close to those of the ladies, and one gentleman in particular, a resident in the Woodstock Hotel, invades the part used by the fair sex. He must, however, recollect that our ladies are not brought up on the Continent, and he should take this hint.”

Woodstock Beach, now only a remnant, watched many dramas of the sea. But the strangest incident I have been able to trace occurred in 1884, when a party of Bushmen were brought down from the North-West Cape and put into camp near the Salt River mouth. The idea was that farmers would visit the camp and engage the Bushmen as labourers. It looked like being a successful experiment until one of the little people took a dislike to a Malmesbury farmer and let fly with a poisoned arrow. That must have been the first poisoned arrow used on Woodstock Beach for at least two centuries.

BEYOND THE remnant of Woodstock Beach is Paarden Eiland. Some of the overseas buyers who attend the annual wool sales there must look in vain for the island. In fact, Paarden Eiland ceased to be an island towards the end of the eighteenth century.

You have to consult old charts at the Archives to discover how this low stretch of country was once separated from the mainland. In the old days a branch of the Diep River (or Visser's Hok River), which enters the sea at Milnerton, flowed south and joined the Salt River. Thus the island was formed, with fairly deep water round parts of it. The former river course

may still be traced, and during a wet winter the “island” sometimes tries unsuccessfully to revert to its former status. The beaches are ravaged by winter gales and eroded to an extent that must worry the road-builders.

Paarden Eiland was first an island of donkeys. Governor de la Fontaine, who introduced donkeys into the Cape, set the island aside for grazing. He used the donkeys to carry fresh fish and other items for his own table. Long after that time Arend van Kielligh, wagon and horse contractor to the Dutch East Indian Company, was granted the use of the island and built the first house there. Van Kielligh would be surprised to see the modern development of Paarden Eiland, with its restaurants, factories, huge stores and other enterprises.

It is difficult to fix the date when Paarden Eiland received its present name. One of the earliest references occurs in Thunberg's account of Woltemade's brave feat in 1773, when *De Jonge Thomas* was wrecked. Thunberg wrote: “An old man of the name of Woltemade, by birth a European who was at this time the keeper of the beasts in the menagerie near the garden, had a son in the Castle who was a corporal and among the first to be ordered out to Paarden Eiland, where a guard was to be set for the preservation of the wrecked cargo.”

There have been other wrecks on Paarden Eiland since then, but the loss of *De Jonge Thomas* was the most dramatic and disastrous. Historians have recorded the rescue of fourteen people by Woltemade before he was drowned. They have overlooked the callous behaviour of the officials and soldiers on the beach. They put up a gallows and announced that anyone who approached the spot would be hanged with trial. People willing to help those on the wreck were driven away. The soldiers cared only for the Company's cargo, and thus perished 149 sailors. Only sixty-three survived the wreck. One man reached the shore naked and found his own sea-chest with his name cut into the lid. A young lieutenant caned him and sent him naked to town. Yet the soldiers themselves looted the cargo and marched back with their musket barrels stuffed with valuable gold lace.

Wolraad Woltemade was buried without ceremony in a grave without a headstone. Cape Town has honoured his memory only by naming a cemetery after him. A fitting place for a Woltemade memorial, which has often been suggested, would be on the shore of Paarden Eiland where *De Jonge Thomas* met her end in the surf.

Many relics of lost ships have been uncovered by gales in the sand of Paarden Eiland beach in recent years. Many an interesting find by keen-

eyed beachcombers has gone unrecorded – for obvious reasons. At the present time the last of the *Commodore's* timbers (the ship in which the “Bounty” film was made) jut up from the beach where the ship was cast ashore after she had been stripped.

A lime burner named Peters was granted the use of Paarden Eiland early last century, but fishermen and wagon-drivers were allowed to cross the island. On two occasions Paarden Eiland became an isolation camp – first for Hottentots suffering from smallpox, and later for lepers.

The earliest industry there has vanished without trace. Lagoons were formed by the winter seas, yielding salt when they dried up in summer. This was highly prized by the pioneers. For some years, however, ordinary settlers were not allowed beyond the salt pans for fear that they would trade with the Hottentots. The salt was loaded into a thirty-foot boat (the second to be built on the shores of Table Bay) and taken to the fort.

No doubt you remember that ludicrous hunting episode, described by Van Riebeeck, of the rhinoceros that sank into one of the salt pans. That was on Paarden Eiland, and here is Van Riebeeck's account: “It was still alive, and had sunk so deep in the mud that he could not come out. Went to see and had him killed. Would not have been able to kill him on hard ground. Had

more than a hundred bullets fired into him before he was dead. Had a piece of meat cut out of his side, and fired into the hole, so killing him.”

A Bushman's skull found on Paarden Eiland some years ago started a scientific controversy. Professor M. R. Drennan announced that a hole in the skull was made by primitive man himself with the help of a crude instrument and with the motive of relieving pressure symptoms. In other words, the Bushmen knew something about the surgical process called trepanning. If this theory was correct, this was the first example of a trepanned Bushman skull ever discovered.

A later Paarden Eiland find, made while a road was being built in 1939, was a tombstone with a cryptic German inscription: “Here rests in peace Frederick Adolf Siems, born May 23, 1783, and who went to God on March 11, 1799. In my youth my life, and those of six others, belonged to someone else. They belonged to misery and pain. The world was not to my satisfaction. Therefore I have left it and joined eternity.”

It sounds as though the unhappy young man committed suicide.

There must be more relics⁹ of past centuries under the sands and soil of Paarden Eiland – once the frontier of Van Riebeeck's little colony.

⁹ There is a legend that the hated Governor Van Noodt's body was taken secretly through the Castle sally-port and buried on Paarden Eiland. The coffin at the official funeral was empty.

CHAPTER 25

NORTHERN SUBURBS

VOORTREKKERWEG, the road to Cape Town's northern suburbs, the oldest wagon track in the Cape, has come to resemble a modern American highway. These northern suburbs, which are making such dramatic progress, are always in the news nowadays. Yet their growth is so recent that some of the farms in the area have not yet given way to factories and housing estates.

When you drove out to Bellville a quarter of a century ago each village along the route had a distinct personality. You were in the country. Today, but for the Afrikaans signs on many of the shops, you might be in the Main Street of Sinclair Lewis. The smart line of cafes, service stations and shop-windows is almost continuous.

“So oud soos die Kaapse wapad” is a saying that indicates the age of this route. The pioneer farmers brought their sheep and produce through the dunes and reeds to supply ships in Table Bay. Burchell, early last century, called this trek a nightmare.

Just over a century ago John Montagu, colonial secretary and road-builder, decided to put convicts to work making a hard road through the sea of sand.

The scheme was opposed on the ground that the south-easter would soon cover the ground with sand again. Montagu was not a man to be easily defeated. He planted wild figs and Australian trees to bind the sand, and designed a cambered road surface so that the sand would drift off on each side. So successful was Montagu's *hardepad* that exactly a hundred years ago a daily passenger coach service was organized over this route between Cape Town and Stellenbosch.

Most of the villages along the road came much later. Goodwood's first house was built in 1905. Now the population is approaching 50,000. Just beyond Goodwood is Elsie's River, or Elsie's Kraal as it was called before the end of the seventeenth century. Later it was known as Elsevier's Halt. But there never was an Elsie or an Elsevier, and the original Elsjé is a mysterious figure. You will also search in vain for a river.

Just past the eighth milestone at Elsie's River there once stood a famous place of refreshment named the Arcadian Coffee House. Fifty years ago you could have seen the Sandveld wagons, loaded with oathay, at this outspan; the Kuils River wagons with pumpkins, tomatoes and firewood; ox-wagons and donkey-carts. Many a watermelon was cut up there under the thorn trees. The widow who conducted the Arcadian Coffee House played the

piano so well that the wagon-drivers lingered on to hear her recitals – and order more coffee, and the extra-large buns which were her speciality.

Parow gained its name from Captain Johann Heinrich Parow, a seafarer from the Baltic who was wrecked in Table Bay and settled in Cape Town. He made a fortune in the meat trade, bringing down cattle from Namaqualand. Then he speculated in property and laid out Parow township.

Eleven miles from Cape Town was the Soopieshoogte outspan, where drivers and their animals refreshed themselves at the rise. Drivers of fruit-carts and milk-carts still lead their horses to the old drinking-trough. Hardekraaltjie was the next stop in the wagon days, and the Hardekraaltjie outspan is still there, covering sixteen morgen in the midst of modern Bellville. The old outspans are appreciated by picnic and braaivleis parties. If you have travelled not less than five miles you are legally entitled to outspan facilities, including the right to pitch a tent for twenty-four hours.

Sand, as I have said, was the enemy all along this route before the hard road was built. Haardekraaltjie was solid veld, hence the name. When the railways was built in the 'sixties of last century there were farmers who refused to believe that the engines could pull their loads through sand where sixteen oxen had often failed to haul a wagon. There is a tale of one of these

sceptical farmers who travelled to Bellville in an early train. The engine-driver whistled as he entered the station. “Yes, you can whistle now, you old ...” commented the farmer. “But you did not dare to whistle on the sands.”

Bellville's origin goes back to 1701, when the farm Lowenstein was granted to Maarten Poussion on condition that he gave a tenth of his corn each year to the company. He was also required to plant oaks. At that time the area was called Tygerberg, because the dark brown patches on the hills were like leopard markings. Much later came the name Twelve Mile Stone, and this was the distance from the Town House in Greenmarket Square. Durbanville was plain D'Urban in those days, so Twelve Mile Stone was also known as D'Urban Road because the roads joined there.

Finally, in 1861, the place was officially named Bellville in honour of Mr. Charles Bell, surveyor-general. Twenty years later, however, Bellville consisted of a shop, hotel, police station and one private house. Until the end of the century travellers still spoke of D'Urban Road, or Hardekraaltjie.

Stickland, beyond Bellville, was a Dutch East India Company's post in the seventeenth century. Barrow, the traveller, recorded that Sir James Craig built stables for the dragoons and stone buildings for the officers and men

“as it is a point of great importance in the event of an attack from a powerful enemy “

Still farther on is Brackenfell, another growing village. A Yorkshire farmer named Walton settled there long ago, observed the bracken growing on the fell (hill) and named the place. He also provided ground for a railway station and post office, but insisted on the name Brackenfell being used. The final “L” fell off the railway signboard, and so in the course of time everyone spelt the name “Brackenfel”. Only recently was the missing “L” restored, and the Place-Names Commission has now approved of the original spelling – “Brackenfell”.

Kuils River, which recently became a municipality, is another very old Cape place name, though when it was first mentioned as a resting-place in 1676 it was “De Kuiljen”, the pools. A house was built there, and the Company's cattle were watered there on the way to town.

Michelsville was the alternative name of Kuils River in the middle of last century. Mr. Holloway, who kept the Half-Way House there, believed in advertising. Here is one of his efforts: “Wearied traveller, do you require a good feed for your horse? A good and substantial meal for yourself A capital, clean, Christian like, cosy, consoling, comfortable, curtained couch?

If so, you may obtain these and many other good things of this world by calling at the Half-Way House. Those truly manly old English amusements, cricket, quoits and skittles, are offered to supporters. The premises may be recognized by the striking, tall and singularly beautiful graceful *Eucalyptus gigantea* waving before the door.”

CHAPTER 26

SOUTH PENINSULA

IT took Cape Town people a long time to discover Muizenberg and the shore which many regard as the finest surfing beach in the world. They called the place Steenbergenhoek two centuries ago, when the Dutch built a fort to command the narrow road to Simon's Bay. But there was an outpost before that, commanded by Wynand Willem Muys, sergeant and later captain in the Company's service. Muys would hardly recognize his own name in the modern Muizenberg; it was formerly Muysenberg, and it might well be changed back to that.

Muys had armorial bearings displaying three mice, with another mouse on the crest. He died in 1754 and was buried in the Groote Kerk. Some say that Muizenberg received its name because certain rocks resembled mice. I can see no reason to cheat the memory of old Captain Muys when the origin of the name is so clear. The fort was needed when four British men-o'-war bombarded the Muizenberg garrison in 1795. This was the only occasion when any part of the Cape Peninsula came under heavy fire from the ships of an invader. Colonel de Lille, defender of Muizenberg, soon fled in panic; but a tough Lieutenant Marnitz stuck to his two twenty-four pounders and

answered the English fire as best he could. A few balls passed through the ships, causing little damage. Marnitz spiked his guns at last and retreated. The Battle of Muizenberg was over.

Captain Robert Percival passed through Muizenberg the following year and found British troops occupying the post. "Here I saw the flamingo," he wrote. "Tygers, hyenas, wolves and jackals infest the neighbouring hills."

For a highly-imaginative description of life at Muizenberg early last century I can recommend a forgotten best-seller entitled *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Military Career of John Shipp*, published in London in 1829. John Shipp called the place Muizenbourg and had much to say about the baboons.

"On these hills whole regiments of baboons assemble, for which this station is particularly famous," wrote Shipp. "They stand six feet high and in features and manners approach nearer the human species than any other quadruped I have ever seen. These rascals, who are most abominable thieves, used to annoy us exceedingly. When we went to parade we were invariably obliged to leave armed men for the protection of our property, and even in spite of this they have frequently stolen our blankets and great-coats or anything else they could lay their claws on."

One day a soldier's wife washed a blanket and hung it out to dry. To the indignation of the regiment, the baboons stole the blanket. A strong punitive expedition, armed with sticks and stones, set out against the baboons.

“I was on the advance with about twenty men, and made a detour to cut the baboons off from their caverns” wrote Shipp. “The baboons, however, observed this movement and detached fifty of their number to guard the entrance. We saw them collecting stones and other missiles. One old grey-haired one in particular, who had often visited our barracks and was known as Father Murphy, was seen distributing his orders and planning the attack with the judgment of one of our best generals. A scream from Father Murphy was the signal for a general encounter. The host of baboons under his command rolled down enormous stones on us. We were obliged to give up or some of us would have been killed. They followed us to our very doors, shouting in indication of victory, and during the whole night we heard dreadful yells and screaming. In the morning we found they had been fighting over the division of the stolen blanket, which had been torn into eight or ten pieces.”

After that, declared Shipp, the soldiers dared not venture out unless five or six of them went together. Father Murphy became so bold that one day he

walked straight into the grenadiers' barracks. He was in the act of purloining a sergeant's regimental coat when a corporal's guard captured him.

“He was a most powerful brute and too much for any single man,” declared Shipp. “We did not like to kill him, so we muzzled him and shaved his head and face and turned him loose. He submitted very quietly and when shaved he was really an exceedingly good-looking fellow. I have seen many a 'blood' in Bond Street not half so prepossessing in appearance. We then started him up the hill, though he seemed rather reluctant to leave us. Some of his companions came down to him, but they did not know him again and pelted him with stones and beat him unmercifully with sticks. Father Murphy then sought protection from his enemies. In time he became domesticated and tame. There are many now alive in His Majesty's 22nd regiment of foot who can vouch for the truth of this anecdote.”

There was a public sale of the damaged cargo of the wrecked Dutch ship *Vrouw* on Muizenberg beach in 1818 – spices and Java coffee. The French brig *Penelope* had been lost there previously. In 1839 the barque *Admiral Cockburn* went ashore. I believe that was Muizenberg's last shipwreck.

Banbury, a visitor in 1838, wrote: “Mr. Harvey drove me in his gig to Muysenberg. There is nothing deserving the name of village, only a few

scattered cottages on the seashore along the foot of the mountain. Between its base and the sea there is but a very narrow strip of sand along which the road is carried. This pass was once guarded by several batteries, now abandoned and dilapidated.”

As a seaside resort, Muizenberg remained neglected long after the middle of last century. For some reason Cape Town people favoured Kalk Bay. It was not until 1882 that building lots were offered for sale at Muizenberg “facing the splendid beach, the finest bathing ground in South Africa”. During that year the railway arrived.

Muizenberg really owed its development to visitors from other parts of South Africa. In 1897, for example, a Kimberley syndicate bought Farmer Peck's Hotel for £12,000. British troops from Wynberg had a rest camp on the site of the present Muizenberg bowling greens. There was a spring on this property from which residents drew their water, while others found “Jamieson's Spring” useful.

One bathing box, labelled “Farmer Peck's”, stood on the beach, and there was a small wooden enclosure without roof or flooring for the public. Nearby was a wood and iron shanty known as “Starvation Camp” because it was used by

young men who cooked their own food. More amenities have been provided at modern Muizenberg, but in those days at least you could see the sea.

AT LAST the little Muizenberg cottage where Cecil Rhodes died has been converted into a museum. This is a transformation which people from the Cape to the Copper Belt have been urging for years.

The cottage is not exactly as Rhodes left it. I have seen a photograph of the original cottage with Rhodes on the stoep, looking out over False Bay; and in those days it had a roof of sheet iron. Rhodes, with his simple tastes, preferred this cottage to all other residences. He had to have a mansion where he could entertain distinguished visitors, and Groote Schuur served that purpose. But he vastly preferred the False Bay coast, and he intended to rebuild the cottage.

The cottage has three large bedrooms and a living room. The front wall is of stone and clay, the remainder of brick. In the garden is a caretaker's cottage which was originally a fisherman's hut. Such were the tastes of a great man. He lived in a similar cottage in Kimberley; and in Salisbury he chose a rondavel.

His furniture was so cheap and plain that no comment was aroused when it disappeared after his death. Some he had given to his valet; some went to a second-hand dealer. At the time, no one thought of preserving even the bed in which Rhodes died. The cash value of this historic piece of furniture was about £1. An attempt was made by the City Council in 1946 to trace the furniture, and this brought to light George William Krieger (then aged 68), who had been Rhodes's valet.

Krieger was present during the last illness, and had helped with the oxygen apparatus. A testimonial given to him by Mr. Jourdan, the private secretary, recorded his services. Linen, crockery, cutlery, pots and pans were given to Krieger. He also had a dining-room table and dressing table from the cottage.

An iron-bed with brass knobs, which had come from the cottage, was recovered from a second-hand dealer and stored in the loft at Groote Schuur. After this lapse of time, however, it is difficult to establish the authenticity of all the various pieces of simple furniture used by Rhodes. Nevertheless, some of the furniture which was at Groote Schuur in the Rhodes period has been transferred to the Muizenberg cottage. Photographs and other exhibits tell the life story of Rhodes.

Sir Abe Bailey was responsible for the alterations to the cottage. He had the iron roof replaced by thatch, and he also widened the stoep. Rhodes himself had intended to make these changes, and Sir Abe Bailey had the plans. Barkly Cottage was the original name, and Rhodes bought the place from the estate of Mr. J. R. Reid in February, 1899. He must often have thought of this cool and peaceful retreat when he was besieged in Kimberley. After the siege Rhodes went to the cottage to recuperate. Sometimes he used a Cape cart on his drives to Muizenberg; but in 1902 his first motor-car pulled up outside the cottage. The Cape cart is now one of the exhibits.

Then came the last illness. The small window in the southern wall, of course, marks the hole knocked hurriedly through the brickwork to give the dying man more air.

The Rhodes trustees remained in charge of the cottage until 1932 when it was given to the Government of Northern Rhodesia. Colonial officials on leave made use of it. It was transferred to the City Council in 1937 on condition that it was kept in good condition as a memorial to Rhodes. The municipal valuation at that time was £5,000. Now the promise has been redeemed at last. Fireproofing has been installed and the roof has been re-thatched. In the room where Rhodes died stands a pedestal of Rhodesian teak

and a bust of Rhodes with this inscription: “Towards sunset at six o'clock on the 26th day of March, 1902, Cecil John Rhodes passed away on a simple bed which stood on this spot.”

IF YOU asked me to name the most secluded and peaceful village in the Cape Peninsula I would select Noordhoek. For most people, Noordhoek is no more than an oak-shaded glimpse during the Chapman's Peak drive.

Farmers have been at work there for more than two centuries. It has fine oaks and homesteads; but there is no church or municipal office, no water scheme, no hotel, no electricity, no cinema and no doctor. You can find men of seventy-nine and eighty still attending to their market gardens. There is an air of repose in Noordhoek, and a rich background. De Goede Hoop was the first farm there, and the older residents still call the village Goede Hoop. It was granted to the widow of Fredrik Russouw by Van Imhoff in 1743.

The name Noordhoek is something of a mystery. Some say it is due to strong north winds, while others declare that it is a corruption and that originally it meant “Norwegian Corner”. It is more like a by-way in England.

Chapman's Peak, which dominates Noordhoek, is a greater mystery still, and all the writers on place-names confess that it has baffled them. Although it is clearly an English name, Chapman's Peak and Chapman's Bay appear on Dutch and French maps and charts printed years before the first British occupation. The search for a ship named the Chapman has been unsuccessful. It was suggested by the Rev. E. H. Buckland that the early Dutch settlers might have called the peak after the Kaapmans, the Hottentots of the Cape Peninsula, and that it would have been an easy transition to Chapman's Peak. But this, he admitted was sheer guesswork.

Old people in Noordhoek have their own legend. They say that a Dutch admiral was riding on the beach one day with an English visitor when they met a farmer and asked him the name of the peak.

“It has no name,” replied the farmer.

“All right then,” announced the admiral, turning to the Englishman. “We'll give it your name – Chapman's Peak.” Almost the whole of present-day Noordhoek was sold to Jacobus Hurter in 1821 for under £1,000. Other settlers of that period were Alexander and Joseph Hare, Robert Scott, William Fairlie and a Frenchman named Isaac Cornelis de Villiers. It is

interesting to note that for many years last century Chapman's Peak was known in Noordhoek as “Oom Izaksekop” – after Isaac de Villiers.

There is still a Mr. J. S. de Villiers in Noordhoek, aged eighty-two, but he is a descendent of the Huguenot family which arrived with the first party of refugees. He has been living there since 1881, and is probably the oldest of Noordhoek's 350 European residents. Another De Villiers of Noordhoek was nicknamed “De Villiers Sixteen” because there were sixteen children in his family.

For 150 years Noordhoek has been a vegetable-garden; for decades last century the men-o'-war at Simonstown drew their supplies from there. It was on the old wagon track from Cape Town that crossed the Muizenberg mountains, passed the long abandoned Zilvermyn, and went through the Noordhoek valley on the way to Simonstown. Today the small holdings still produce tomatoes, potatoes and green vegetables in abundance. Herds of dairy cattle roam the old pastures. Fruit trees and vines, however, do not flourish so well here as elsewhere.

Valuable wild timber, rare in the Peninsula, grows on the late Sir Drummond Chaplain's estate at Noordhoek – ironwood, yellow-wood, wit els, rooi els and assegai wood. Some of it went into ox-wagons in the old

days, and it is remarkable that so many trees should have survived fires and the axe. The white mansion on this estate, designed by Sir Herbert Baker, is known locally as “the Palace”. As a contrast there are the ruins of the slave quarters not far from the entrance gates. Sir Drummond Chaplain paid £3,000 for this large estate during World War I – the price of a small holding today.

Noordhoek lost an architectural rarity a few years ago, when the step gable of the old schoolhouse collapsed. Step gables were built in the early days, but the design died out about a century ago, and there are few survivors. The Noordhoek example was probably the finest example of a “crow step gable” in the Cape. Some say the steps provided an easy way up to the thatch in case of fire. The design is clearly of Gothic origin, and is still to be seen in Holland.

In the sands of Chapman's Bay lie the ribs of an old iron steamer. Across the valley is Kommetjie, and Imhoff's Gift, with its figurehead – an estate given out at the same time as Goede Hoop. All these gracious backwaters seem remote indeed from the city.

Above the lanes and glades of Noordhoek, above the thatched cottages and the village of lamps and candles, is an even more natural world of unspoilt

mountainside. Here are the malachite sunbirds, the everlastings and ericas. Flowers no longer found on Table Mountain survive on these heights. Here the baboon sentinel gives his warning, and the ribbok breaks cover. This is a world of ferns, nerines and anemone, a contrast with Noordhoek's hedge-rows of wattle and poplar. Only the mountaineer knows the sanctuaries that still remain unchanged, far above the dusty highways.

FISH HOEK is an enterprising suburb which has doubled in population since the war and now has seven thousand people. Yet I was talking recently to a Fish Hoek resident who camped under the oak trees there at the end of last century. You could count the houses on the fingers of one hand, he said, and unless you were friendly with the owner of Fish Hoek you could not stay there.

Vischhoek was a famous fishing spot early in the eighteenth century, and Governor de la Fontaine kept two donkeys there to bring fresh fish to the Castle for his table. The thatched, gabled building now known as Uit Kyk was the first house, built towards the end of the Dutch rule for the overseers in charge of road construction to Simon's Bay.

Governor the Earl of Clarendon leased the Fish Hoek valley to Hendrik Seagers early last century for farming and fishing. A clause in the lease stipulated that Seagers could not keep “a public wine house”; and the rule holds good to this day. Residents still debate the reason for the ban, and although it was not recorded it is probable that the old Governor was anxious to preserve the soldiers and sailors at Simonstown from temptation. Nothing less than an Act of Parliament will be needed to alter the status of modern Fish Hoek – the only “dry” municipality in the Union.

Fish Hoek's first owner was Andries Bruins, who secured the grant from Lord Charles Somerset in 1818. He sold out two years later for 50,000 Cape guilders (£1,250), little knowing that his land one hundred and thirty years later would be worth at least £1,000,000.

The fine Homestead at Fish Hoek, burnt down in 1947, was built by Thomas Palmer in the eighteen-twenties. It is true that the gable was dated 1719, but the earliest diagram shows Uit Kyk as the only house.

The estate was surveyed into three portions in 1827 – the “Great or Whale Fishery”, the “Herring Fishery” and “Klein Tuin”. Whaling flourished for many decades, and “Skeleton Rock” was the spot where the whales were flensed. Whale oil was stored in the Uit Kyk basement.

After that Fish Hoek remained in a primitive state for nearly a century. Only in 1921 was a local board formed; and in that year bungalow dwellers and campers were still lining up at the solitary pump on the Kommetje road and paying for their water – two paraffin tins full for a penny. Plots were still being sold for ten pounds.

“Klein Tuin” became Clovelly in recent years. Two cannon, both bearing the date 1782, were unearthed there some years ago, relics of Governor Sluysken's retreat from Simonstown when Craig and Elphinstone landed. They were French guns, with the fleur-de-lis on the trunnion pins. Klein Tuin was an eighteenth century farm, and the remains of the cattle kraal are still to be seen.

Modern in so many pleasant ways, Fish Hoek has a claim to fame as the site of a remarkable cave, the Peers Cave or Skildersgat a little way up the valley. The rock paintings of the old Skildersgat disappeared almost completely under the smoke of cave-men's fires; but the cave has yielded many important skulls, skeletons and implements of prehistoric man.

Most significant of all these finds was the “Fish Hoek Man” ancestor of the Bushman, and (according to Sir Arthur Keith) a member of a race which inhabited South Africa fifteen thousand years ago. Keith described this skull

as “the largest-brained type of humanity so far discovered”. The skull of “Fish Hoek Man” was sent on a world tour so that anthropologists of many countries could examine it. “It will be a long while before so perfect a discovery as that made by the Peers is repeated,” predicted Sir Arthur Keith.

Scrapers, bead borers, stone blades, bone bodkins for sewing the skins of animals, spear heads, mother-of-pearl ornaments, arrow-points – this cave has proved to be a treasure-house of the distant past. The few paintings that survive, human hands in yellow ochre, are the only cave paintings ever discovered in the Cape Peninsula.

Not far away is Tunnel Cave, where implements made by men of the Middle Stone Age were found not long ago. One fine specimen of a lance-head was picked off a rock shelf where it had rested undisturbed for thousands of years.

Although modern Fish Hoek is a mushroom, there is continuity on these shores. More than a century ago the Muller brothers owned the farm and fished in the bay; today their great-grandsons are still living at Fish Hoek and one of them carries on the fishing industry.

Up on Fish Hoek mountain there is a stone shelter where generations of fishermen have scanned False Bay for the patches that reveal the shoals of

harders, yellowtail or snoek. With whistles and white and blue flag signals they have directed the boat skippers far below. Using the same technique as they did in the early days, they encircle the fish with their trek-nets and bring them at last to the beach. Fishermen always complain that the old days were better – but it is not so long ago that the crew of a Fish Hoek boat counted a record catch of twenty-one thousand harders. Fish Hoek maintains its fishing traditions.

SIMONSTOWN IS growing. It is one of those favoured places which encourages old age, and you can still find people who remember it as an isolated village without a railway. Yet the local census figures released not long ago showed a total population of more than eight thousand residents, with another two thousand naval and military personnel.

In such a town you can form a picture of old times at first hand. Years ago I knew three sisters living in a cottage high above the bay; and all three passed the century mark. Recently I met a Malay named Omar Potts,, aged ninety-six, who remembered more departed ships and bygone admirals than any other man in the port. Omar Potts used to watch the lamplighter going his rounds with a torch burning at the end of a wand. He knew the transport

riders who drove through the heavy sand and streams of the beach route, carrying passengers and mails between Kalk Bay and Simonstown. Saban the Malay was one famous driver, Frieslaar was another. They knew all the dangers of high tides and quicksand's on the narrow track between the mountains and the sea.

It is believed that an English pirate ship was the first to anchor in Simon's Bay. Dutch officials put up the first harbour buildings more than two centuries ago. For long afterwards the place was regarded as a far outpost, cut off from Cape Town; and troops were relieved every three months so that they could not complain of long exile.

Corners of Simonstown still recall the fishing village of winding lanes and unplanned terraces that grew up round the bay. It is a town of naval relics and fragments of Dutch East India days; a town of by-ways, moss-covered steps, aged fig trees, gnarled vines and cobbled lanes.

Sir John Barrow, a late eighteenth century traveller, was not impressed with Simonstown. "It is a name with which a collection of about a dozen houses has been dignified," he said. "Few supplies are to be had there, it being necessary to bring from Cape Town in carts whatever newcomers are in need of. The hire of a paltry cart is from twenty to thirty dollars a day. I

have known of fifty paid for one, and it is to be observed that they can only make one journey in the twenty-four hours.”

Some still see in the old parts a strong resemblance to a Devon smugglers' cove. Lady Anne Barnard was pleasantly surprised. “I find the place rather better looking than I expected, the houses on the outside being, as is the Dutch fashion, all well white-washed with their clean shirts on,” she wrote.

Here, during the Napoleonic wars, the men of H.M.S. *Rattlesnake* mutinied. “We have been oppressed by young and inexperienced officers who had learned to command before they had learned obedience,” declared the seamen. They had suffered cruel punishments and bad food. Nevertheless, four of the leaders were hanged at the yard-arm.

Though the bay was fairly safe in winter, the summer southeasters played havoc in the anchorage. One naval writer called it “a land of hurricanes”, and described a south-easter that blew for a fortnight. During that time the boats of the flagship found it impossible to communicate with the shore.

Simonstown's first naval yard was fenced with timbers from H.M.S. *Sceptre*, the ship which was wrecked in Table Bay at the end of the eighteenth century with the loss of 348 lives.

A queer spectacle in Simon's Bay in 1800 was the hulk which had been H.M.S. *Hope*. She was in such unseaworthy condition that she was sold to a speculator. This enterprising man brought her close to the beach, provided a bridge, and let the officers' quarters as dwellings and the rest of the ship as store-rooms.

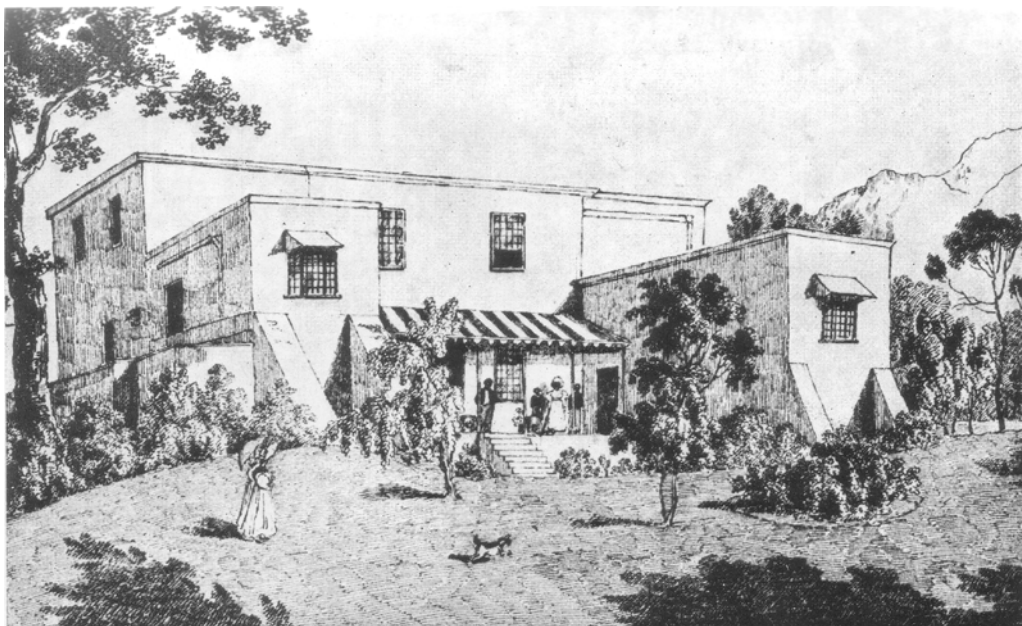
Colonel E. E. Napier thought the Simonstown of a century ago looked like the villages he has seen on the coasts of Spain and Italy. It was certainly a town of canteens at that time, with the King John at one end of the street, Noah's Ark at the other. A clergyman complained that he had observed a thousand drunken seamen of many nationalities on one day.

The finest house built at Simonstown in the early days of the settlement was the stately Residency, and the ground floor must be almost as old as the town itself. Although it stands close to Admiralty House, the Residency is inconspicuous. Its wide steps and veranda of square paving stones have been trodden by a long line of famous men. From that lovely veranda, generations of naval officers and Cape officials have looked out over Simon's Bay and watched sail gradually giving way to steam, wooden ships departing as the first iron-clads arrived.,

Old documents reveal that the Residency was once thatched. Otherwise it does not seem to have changed much since 1776, when the upper part was added. You enter the huge rooms through cabin doors that came from some Dutch East India ship. The worn floors are black with age, but the yellow-wood planks are firm enough.

First occupant of the Residency was a mere sergeant, but after the building had been enlarged the Governor of the Cape often stayed there when the Dutch fleet was in port during the winter months. At the end of the eighteenth century the building was used as a naval hospital; and in 1814 it became the magistrate's house and courtroom. The barred cells have rings in the walls for chains. One cell has heavy stocks where once a row of prisoners had to sit uncomfortably supporting themselves on their hands or lying flat on their backs. Many a slave, many a mutinous seaman, must have been punished in that torture chamber.

A mystery of the Residency is the very old mural painting over a door that was bricked in years ago. It depicts a coast scene on a windy day, with a girl holding a fishing-net and a white-bearded man crowned with leaves. A problem picture indeed, which puzzled visitors have studied for more than 150 years without finding an answer.



Protea, suburban residence of the Governor of the Cape in 1832.

Britain's great naval hero walked these streets. He first called at the Cape as Midshipman Horatio Nelson, aged fifteen, bound for the East Indies in 1773

on board the frigate *Seahorse*. Three years later H.M.S. *Dolphin* put into Simon's Bay with Nelson as a passenger. His health had broken down, and he was returning to England. Nelson thought little of the Cape, however, and long afterwards he made a speech in the House of Lords defending the conduct of the Ministers who had restored the Colony to the Dutch. "I have myself been there and consider it merely a tavern in the passage which often delays the voyage," declared Lord Nelson. "While the Dutch held it you could buy a cabbage there for two-pence, but since it was in our hands a shilling was obliged to be paid for a cabbage. It produces little that makes it worth holding, and it cannot be maintained but at enormous expense."

Nelson's first command ended her days at Simonstown. She was the ten-gun brig *Badger*, and as a lieutenant Nelson had sailed her off Panama, protecting British merchantmen from American privateers. The *Badger* lay in Simon's Bay for nearly thirty years, first as a mooring vessel, finally as a coal-hulk. She was broken up in 1860.

Not often does a coal-hulk become a flagship, but that was the destiny of a grimy ship, H.M.S. *Seringpatam*, that lay at anchor near the *Badger*. Built in 1809, the *Seringpatam* was still in service at Simon's Bay in 1870 as a depot ship. Another famous ship that lay for years in Simon's Bay was

H.M.S. *Monarch*, pride of the Royal Navy in 1869. She was a pre-Dreadnought, largest and most heavily-armoured man-o'-war in the world. Gradually her importance diminished; until she became a guard-ship in Simon's Bay.

In the first half of last century the admiral at Simonstown commanded a vast naval station stretching (in theory at least) from the Equator to the Antarctic, and including the east and west coasts of Africa and “the Brazils”, St. Helena and Mauritius.

Simonstown was a port of call for a great many merchant ships last century. Some put in for repairs. Their cargoes were lightered to the wharf and sold by auction in the main street – cargoes of coffee and spices, sold and loaded on ox-wagons and sent off along the beaches to Cape Town.

Great sales of “surplus or unserviceable material” have been held by the Royal Navy in recent years. You could bid for anything from a steam pinnacle to a pickle-jar at those sales. Seaboats and anchor-chains, whalers and dinghies, binoculars and nut-crackers, handcuffs, megaphones, bailers and boat-hooks were all on the disposal list.

Robert Falcon Scott knew Simonstown as a midshipman. Tyrwhitt, Keyes, Halsey, one future admiral after another handled picket-boats in the

crowded anchorage. Edgar Wallace gazed across this bay when he was a medical orderly at the military hospital. Here he wrote some of his early poems in the Kipling manner.

On the main road you can still find an oven, built by British naval gunners early last century, where round shot were brought to red heat, hooked out with tongs and dropped into muzzle-loading cannon. In Simonstown the atmosphere of horn lanterns, ruffles and rapiers has not entirely vanished.

Leisurely and old-fashioned in some ways, however, Simonstown has always been sensitive to distant rumblings. Not only in wartime, but between wars, Simonstown is alert and well-informed. It was alert in 1904, when the doomed Russian fleet rounded Cape Point. Simonstown knows that it is still the key to one of the great trade routes of the world.

CHAPTER 27

HORSE AND CART

AMONG the gradual changes Cape Town has watched during the first half of this century has been the disappearance of horses, wagons, carts and carriages from the streets. Nearly all the craftsmen have gone, too – the wagon-builders, blacksmiths and wheelwrights. Stables are vanishing. In the city the men who depend on horse-drawn traffic for their livelihood are making their last stand. No doubt there will be riding-schools and race-horses at the end of the century. But the boldest horse-lover, I imagine, would not care to forecast the survival of a single hansom-cab.

The largest single employer of horses and mules, of course, is the S.A.R., with about 150 in the stables at the foot of Adderley Street. When horses are needed to draw carriages through the streets on ceremonial occasions, these stables can supply beauties. Hawkers also cling to the horse, but the fleet of hansom-cabs is vanishing. Nevertheless, I believe Cape Town still has more hansoms than London.

I have traced the hansom-cab back to 1849, when the first of those famous vehicles was imported by Sir Robert Stanford. Sedan chairs had only just disappeared. Ten years later there were sixty hansoms in Adderley Street,

plying without a fixed tariff. Most of the drivers charged a shilling for any distance in town and half-a-crown an hour for longer trips.

Hansom-cabs flourished during the whole second half of last century, though the drivers held a protest meeting in 1894, when electric tram-cars were introduced. *The Cape Argus* commented: "Jarvey is a very decent sort of fellow, though an arch-extortioner. The majority of people are only too glad of an excuse for taking a cab. There is something like fierce joy in a ride in a hansom, and a race through the busy streets is near akin to the careless joy of boyhood. The crack of the whip sends the blood through your veins and you alight with braced nerves and brightened eye. Jarvey is far too important a person to be dispensed with. An electric tramway in every street would not drive him from the rank."

Some years later there were complaints in the newspapers about Cape Town's daredevil drivers. It was said that crossing a street in London or New York was safer than in Cape Town. Then a disgusted stranger chimed in. He had engaged a hansom-cab at the Cape Town railway station and asked to be taken to the Grand Hotel. After a ride of a couple of hours the cab pulled up at the hotel and he paid fifteen shillings. Only next day did he discover that the Grand Hotel was opposite the railway station.

Many officials and business men kept their own hansom-cabs at that period. The chief engineer at Table Bay Docks applied for one early this century for making his inspections, and the Harbour Board called for tenders. A London firm offered “a most excellent vehicle lined with the finest Morocco” for £140. The order went to a local firm, and the engineer received a £90 cab.

Among the Malay characters who spent their lives driving hansoms was Hadji Mogamat Samodien, who died in 1939 just before his ninetieth birthday. He drove a cab for fifty-five years, retiring at eighty. During his last few years he called regularly at the New Somerset Hospital and took poor patients to their homes as an act of charity. Samodien recalled the time when natives preyed on hansoms along the dark Wynberg roads, and cabbies either had to ask for a police escort or fight for their lives.

Hansom-cab drivers all agree that they had the time of their lives during the South African War and the First World War. Open-handed soldiers paid them liberally, and one man told me that he earned sixteen pounds in two hours-paid in gold sovereigns – while the Australians were passing through Cape Town in 1915.

There was a long period when victorias and landaus reaped a rich harvest by carrying race-goers from Kenilworth railway station to the course at a

shilling a head. I believe that the last landau type of four-wheeler went off the road in 1939. Today the open carriage with four white horses is still in demand for Malay weddings, though a driver cannot hope to make a living out of those brilliant occasions.

It is not generally known, or remembered, perhaps, that Cape Town had rickshaws in 1902. They never became popular here, and the Zulus returned to Durban. In that year Cape Town had two hundred hansom-cabs.

Though the first motor-cars had appeared, few realised that the doom of the horse was approaching. A hansom-cab driver could rely on earning £5 to £6 a week, without Australian customers. Stabling was cheap, fodder abundant. So the well-groomed horses jingled along with harness shining and brass twinkling. By 1908, however, there were motor taxi-cabs plying for hire in Cape Town and the Cab Owners' and Cab Drivers' Association had woken up to the danger. They held another protest meeting.

“These motor taxi-cabs will prove the ruination of the cab proprietors and drivers,” prophesied a shrewd speaker. “The farmer will be severely handicapped in the disposal of oat-hay, mealies and bedding. Then in the towns there are the ironmongers, the timber merchants, coachbuilders,

blacksmiths and farriers and all those who make a living feeding and caring for horses. “

Another speaker, not so shrewd, tried to cheer the cabbies with these words: “Like all innovations the motor-cab will be patronized at first, but the whole history of it in other lands show that it very rapidly wanes in popularity. It is continually getting out of order, or causing accidents, and is far too expensive to maintain.”

Long after the coming of the motor-car, the hansom-cabs with their glamorous names attracted lovers of romance. In the darkness, against the background of worn upholstery, many a young couple travelled happily to the tune of hooves on cobblestones.

A familiar horse-drawn vehicle which is no longer seen and heard so often in Cape Town is the fish-cart. Nowadays the fish-cart (and the fish-horn) are regarded as romantic survivals. Early this century the fish-horn was denounced as a nuisance, and in 1906 the fish-cart drivers were almost silenced.

One of their number, John Hollam, was prosecuted by the Mowbray municipality for “disturbing the public peace and quietude by making an unseemly noise by blowing a fish-horn.” John Hollam was fined ten

shillings and went to appeal. His counsel argued: "The blowing of the fish-horn is an old custom in this country and not a public nuisance." The Chief justice remarked: "It may be that people are becoming more nervous. The old people could stand it, but perhaps there are some who find it too much for their nerves. It would be a nuisance, too, if cooks always had their heads out of the window looking for the fish-cart."

Nevertheless, the conviction was quashed and the appeal upheld. The fish-horn, and fish-cart, are still with us.

FOR CENTURIES wheelwrights were born and brought up in Cape Town, members of an hereditary craft. One of the last of the Cape Town wagon makers had to search the countryside for a wheelwright recently; the clan had died out in the city.

This firm has its shop in Newmarket Street, near the Early Morning Market. They found a wheelwright in Paarl – Adam Collins, who started as an apprentice in 1910, a period when people were still gaping at motor-cars and a young wheelwright's future seemed assured. In fact there is still plenty of work for a wheelwright, though this is due mainly to the fact that craftsmen are scarce. Collins learnt his trade in the great wagon-making

shop of Mr. Jan Phillips of Paarl, the same Phillips who was responsible for the famous road up the mountain to Paarl Rock.

Collins grew up among naves, axles, spokes and felloes, and mastered the difficult art of fitting them together so that they rolled away evenly under the new farm wagons. Nowadays he is repairing the less romantic wheels of *stootwaentjies* and hawkers' carts. For the hawkers of Cape Town, as I have said, are among the last and most conservative devotees of the horse. They keep the Newmarket Street firm flourishing. When the railways scrap their horse-drawn wagons, when the municipal stables close down, the hawkers will cling to their carts. It looks as though Adam Collins will be occupied for the rest of his working life.

The firm in Newmarket Street supplies many of the Cape Town hawkers with their vehicles – six shillings a week for a hand-cart, eight shillings and sixpence for a donkey-cart, eleven shillings for a horse-cart and sixteen shillings for a wagon. Every six months the carts and wagons came in for complete overhaul. Every summer the heat shrinks the wooden wheels and the iron tyres have to be shortened. So there is a constant demand for timber, wheels and parts.

One way of keeping the carts in repair is to go to the sales at Bellville and buy up old Cape carts and wagons. It is worth while paying twenty-five pounds for a Cape cart – fine stinkwood often comes to light when the bodywork is broken up.

Australia supplies hickory shafts, felloes and naves, spokes are made from Knysna assegai wood, axles and brushes come from England. There has been a shortage of hickory, and jarrah does not wear as well. Thus the cart-builder welcomes the man with an aged wagon or hansom-cab for sale. The good timber of bygone years keeps the hawkers' carts on the road.

Hawkers prefer to hire their vehicles. When a cart goes in for repair, another cart is supplied immediately so that no trade is lost. A hawker with a good “round” expects to make a pound a day net profit, so that he has no difficulty in paying for the hire of his cart.

Vegetables, fruit, fish and wood – those are the commodities that keep the hawkers going. Some hawkers make a living by buying empty bottles (at a penny each), paraffin tins, old car batteries, and scrap metal, and selling them to dealers. Some of the woodcutters live round their wagons, whole families camping in the bush on the Cape Flats or along the Malmesbury road past Killarney. It is not so easy nowadays to sell a load of Port Jackson

or rooikrans; but the demand increases during the winter months. Much firewood goes to the west coast fishing villages, where local supplies are scanty and the old-fashioned ovens demand quantities of fuel.

No wonder there is still work for Adam Collins, with his adze and mallet, plane and chisel. Half-way through the twentieth century the coal may not glow in many forges, the sound of hammer on anvil may become faint. But outside in the streets of Cape Town the old wheelwright still hears the echo that gives him his living ... clip-clop, clip-clop.

CHAPTER 28

DRAMAS OF TABLE BAY

SIGNAL HILL is no longer a signal station, but it still gives me one of my favourite views of the Table Bay waterfront and the coast as far as Saldanha Heads, sixty-five miles away. Every time I drive there I wonder why there are not more cars.

Nothing larger than a light donkey-cart could be used to carry supplies for the signalmen up the steep track half a century ago. I believe the first motor-car reached the signal station from Kloof Nek in 1909, with Mr. Donald Menzies at the wheel. The present asphalt highway is a legacy of World War II, built during the five years that the drive was closed to the public.

One old navigator who must have enjoyed the view from the easy summit was Commodore Fitzherbert, who named it St. James Mount in honour of King James I of England. He hoisted the English flag there more than thirty years before Van Riebeeck's landing.

Signal Hill became a look-out station in the very early days of Table Valley settlement. Guns were mounted there twenty years later, when Holland feared war with England and France. Mentzel, in 1740, wrote of Tamboers

Kloof as “Flagge Man's Kloof” because the signalman had a cottage there. He also mentioned the flagpost on the “Lion's Tail”.

A vacancy for a “steady, sober man as signalman at the Lion's Rump” was advertised in the *Government Gazette* in 1833. Forty-three years later *The Cape Argus* complained that the signalman was provided with only a small telescope, although the signal station was the most important in the colony; and the man had to use his own pocket compass for taking bearings of ships. “It seems incredible that the government cannot buy a proper telescope for £100, or that the Cape Town merchants should not have subscribed towards one,” declared the newspaper.

Many years ago, when the noon gun was fired from the Castle, a time-ball dropped on Signal Hill. Country visitors to Cape Town were invited by humourists to watch the daily spectacle; and they were told that the Castle gunner knocked the ball off the mast on the hilltop. Thus tales of this fine piece of marksmanship drifted back to the dorps.

Mr. Harvey, signalman in 1909, informed visitors that he kept a shotgun ready, as hares and buck had been nibbling at his garden. No doubt there are some who remember the time when hunters set out from Sea Point and shot quail, partridges and grysbok on the Signal Hill and Lion's Head slopes.

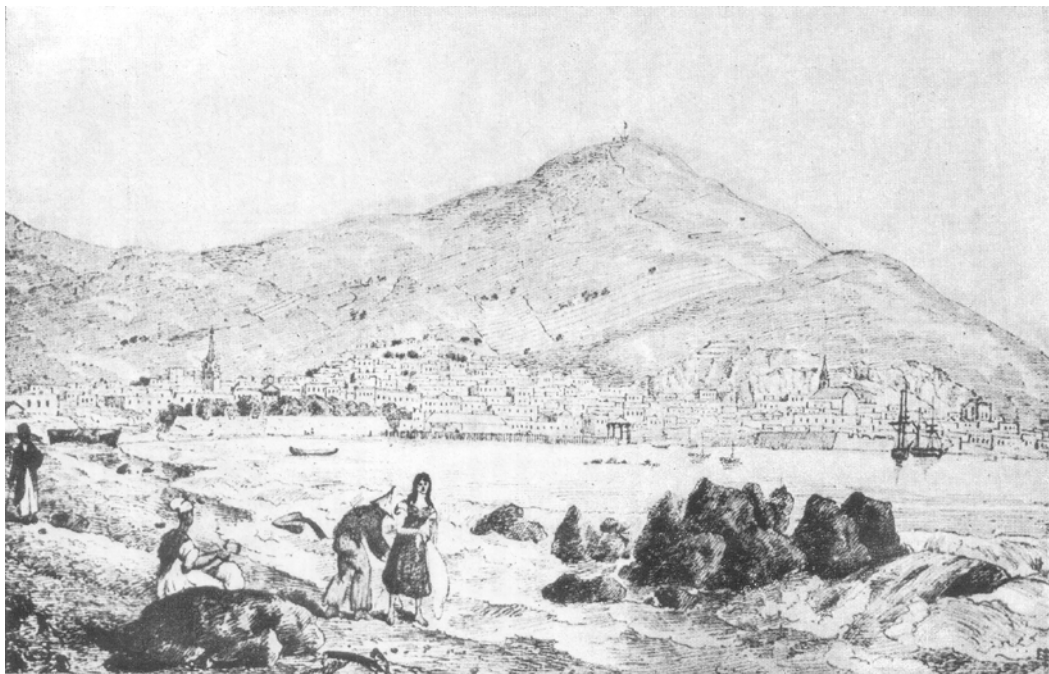


Table Bay waterfront in 1832.

Those old signalmen lived in a world of their own. One, who retired twenty years ago, told me that he once spent four months on Signal Hill without a single visit to the city eleven hundred and fifty feet below. It blew so hard at times that it was difficult to walk round the house. Sometimes he lived in the clouds. And there were days when the sun shone on his house while the city and bay were covered by a white blanket of fog.

He watched a thousand mail boats bound for Table Bay smoking up over the horizon or coming out of the dawn. He turned his telescope on ships in collision, on stranded ships and sinking ships, on ships ablaze and ships captured by the fortunes of war.

“My duty was to watch the sea from sunset to sunrise, to report all incoming ships and to keep a keen look-out for wrecks and ships in distress,” he summed up. “During many years of sea-gazing I have been the first man in Cape Town to sight many fine ships and strange scenes on the ocean.”

He considered that the most stirring event during his life as a signalman was the departure of the great convoy of troopships for South-West Africa early in World War I. He hoisted the “good-bye and good-luck” signal to General Botha as the ships steamed out.

Then there was an August afternoon in 1917 when the signalman saw a ship explode, 20 miles away. She was the *City of Athens*, passenger liner bound from New York to Cape Town; and she had struck a mine laid by a German raider. The masts went over the side, and no S O S message could be sent. Thanks to the Signal Hill look-out, however, a tug went out as soon as she could raise steam and picked up the boatloads of survivors in the darkness.

It cost several thousand pounds a year to maintain the Signal Hill look-out, so in April, 1950, after nearly three centuries of vigilance; the station closed down. The old signalmen loved the place, even though their children had to run down the hill to school every day and clamber up in the afternoon.

Some of the old hands kept private log-books of the famous and interesting ships they had sighted. I can imagine that long procession, sail and steam, from the Portuguese caravels to the paddle-wheeler *Enterprise*, first steam packet to call at Table Bay. Those signalmen watched the convict ship *Waterloo* breaking up off Woodstock beach, drowning nearly two hundred of her company; and they noted the *Neptune's* arrival and departure. They admired the Blackwall clippers, with their black hulls, white ports and long bowsprits. They stared down at the American ship *Arabia* sinking off Mouille Point with a fortune in ivory under her hatches.

When the first regular mail steamers arrived nearly a century ago, each one fired a salute from her twelve-pounder guns, and the Castle replied. Those were great days in Cape Town, for there were no cables and all the overseas news reached South Africa by sea. Almost within living memory came the white painted *Great Eastern* with six masts, four funnels and gigantic paddles – the largest ship of her day. Signal Hill saw them all.

WHALERS BOUND for the Antarctic rank among the most valuable customers in Table Bay Docks nowadays. The powerful steam catchers with their harpoon guns form a strong contrast with the open boats that hunted whales in Table Bay within living memory.

At one time the look-out on Signal Hill hoist a special signal when whales were sighted in the bay. Then the rival whale-boats pulled out swiftly and made sail in pursuit. Boats were smashed, men were drowned in this dangerous trade within sight of the Table Bay beaches. It went on right up to the end of last century, until the deadly explosive harpoon put the open boats out of business.

A humpback whale entered the bay one day in August 1896, and spouted near the breakwater. Mr. Zeeman of Woodstock had two whale-boats ready.

Harpooner in the leading boat was John Coleman, a St. Helena man. Among his crew of five was Adam Carlsen, a Malay who held the Royal Humane Society's medal for saving twenty-one lives at sea.

Somewhere off Robben Island, Coleman brought his narrow boat alongside the humpback just as it broke surface. He flung his iron skilfully, the boat was fast to the whale and now their lives were at stake. Wounded humpbacks are vicious. "Starn all!" cried Coleman, and they backed clear of the thrashing tail. The line was running out of the tub, round the loggerhead, and the harpoon had gone deep into the hump.

If all had gone well, the whale would have towed the boat until it became exhausted. Then Coleman would have gone in with the lance and finished the job. But the strong whale line kinked and the nightmare of many a whaler was upon them. And at that moment the humpback sounded. For a few seconds the line remained taut as a fiddle string. Then the boat was dragged under and capsized, the line parted and the humpback went off spouting blood.

Coleman and a man named Jansen had disappeared. Carlsen swam round collecting mast and oars, and helped two men, Foss and Samodien, to cling

to the timber. He tried to save another man, Peter Raaff, but found that he was dying.

Zeeman arrived in the second boat, and not long afterwards the tug *John Paterson* reached the spot. She brought back the survivors, and Raaff's body, entering the docks with her flag at half-mast.

That was probably the last whaling fatality in Table Bay. Portuguese explorers had driven home the first harpoon in these waters full four centuries earlier. Sir Henry Middleton, in command of an English fleet that sailed round the Cape in 1604, lost a pinnace whaling, and pointed out: "It was very good sport to look on, but very dangerous to them in the boats."

Van Riebeeck had much to say about the Table Bay whaling. He tramped round to the Salt River mouth with his wife to see a stranded whale, and watched the meat-hungry slaves hacking off lumps of flesh. However, the Dutch East India Company decided against a whaling industry on a large scale, for they disliked the idea of sending their experienced Greenland harpooners and valuable boats to the Cape. Seal oil was plentiful enough. So almost throughout the eighteenth century Dutch colonists were forbidden to hunt whales, though American and British whale ships anchored in Table

Bay and secured full cargoes of oil along the coast. English whalersmen once towed a nordkaper to the beach below the Castle and cut it up there.

Whaling from shore bases was opened up during the first British occupation and for some time forty to fifty whales were caught in Table Bay every year. John Murray operated from Robben Island for a long period, but he had to move after the Xosa prophet Makana and thirty other prisoners overpowered the guards and escaped to the mainland in the whale-boats. Murray's Bay is a reminder of that old whaling enterprise.

Table Bay whaling flourished during the first half of last century. Female whales, with an average length of sixty feet, came inshore to calve. Malays manned a number of the boats, and every man received a share of the catch. A large whale fetched from two hundred to four hundred pounds in those days. Then the price of oil fell, and the whales became scarce. As someone remarked at the time: "There were too many tickets for the number of prizes." Rival crews showed daring in the chase, for the first harpooner to strike had first claim on the whale.

Robert Granger was the "Whaling King" of the Cape in the middle of last century. He kept his boats in the cove just beyond the New Somerset Hospital, and thus the inlet became Granger's Bay. A huge blubber pot had

been sunk into a hillock near the landing, and the spot was called “Kyk in die Pot”. Crowds watched the whales being towed in and cut up; but the busy scene vanished when the area was taken over by the military and renamed Fort Wynyard.

Scattered about the Cape Peninsula are relics of these old whaling days – bleached whale ribs used as fence-poles, huge jawbones as gate-posts. There was a time when the disgusted burghers of Cape Town complained that the boiling down of blubber “caused an unhealthy odour to spread over the whole valley.” The hideous aromas have gone for ever, and so have those fearless seamen who manned the graceful whale-boats and fought those long duels amid torrents of blood and spray. “Starn all – for your lives!”

ONE OF the strangest little ships that ever entered Table Bay was the cutter-rigged open boat *Homeward Bound* – twenty feet over all and flying the Norwegian flag. She made an epic voyage indeed, a pioneer of the tiny craft that have sailed the oceans of the world since then; but her achievement seems to have been forgotten.

I was fortunate in discovering a copy of the *Homeward Bound's* log-book in Cape Town recently. Driving force behind this bold enterprise was

Captain Ingvold Nilsen, who found himself “on the beach” in Cape Town when the ship in which he was serving was condemned as unseaworthy. Nilsen went inland, fought as a cavalryman in the Basuto War, then worked in the Orange Free State as a builder.

At this period there was a Norwegian settlement scheme in Natal, and among the settlers were Nilsen's brother Bernhard and an adventurous character named Zefanias Olsen. These two men joined Captain Nilsen in the Free State. All three found themselves almost penniless during the 1885 depression, so they decided to build a boat and sail home.

At Witzieshoek, near Harrismith, they built a house for a farmer¹⁰ in exchange for certain timber they needed. These three determined men cut down trees, made the keel from a twenty foot log, shaped the timbers and planked them with American pitch-pine. Neighbouring farmers came to watch and scoff, and asked them how they would outspan in mid-ocean.

¹⁰ The farmer was a Mr. Avery. His daughter, Mrs. Macmahon, told me that she watched the building of the little ship. The most remarkable thing about the whole venture, she declared, was that Captain Nilsen had only one eye and his brother was almost blind – so that there were only three sound eyes in the boat.

Was it possible to make fast to anything at night? The Norwegians worked on grimly, and in February 1886 the boat was finished.

They were two hundred and fifty miles from the sea, five thousand six hundred feet above sea level. It took a wagon and eighteen oxen to carry the *Homeward Bound* over the highest pass of the Drakensberg and down to the coast. A commando escorted them out to Harrismith. All along the route they exhibited their boat, charging a shilling a head. Villagers were decked out with flags in honour of the unusual visitors. Farmers loaded them with peaches and apples.

At last, on April 19, 1886, the *Homeward Bound* tasted salt water for the first time at Durban. The three adventurers were short of money, but they had enough to stock the watertight provision lockers fore and aft with corned beef, biscuits, bacon, butter and other necessities for about six weeks. Along the keelson the twenty-gallon water casks were stowed. These served as ballast, and were re-filled with sea water when empty.

Captain Nilsen rigged his boat as a cutter, with a square sail for running and studding-sails for fine weather. She was towed out over the bar at the end of April, and ran into heavy weather almost immediately. The three sturdy Norwegians had only a tarpaulin to shelter them. Ten days later the

Homeward Bound anchored off Bird Island, Algoa Bay, where the lighthouse keeper presented the Norwegians with pumpkins, penguin eggs, cabbage and fish.

They sailed on, encountering a gale from the west, but Captain Nilsen noted in his log-book: “The boat rode like a seagull, putting her bowsprit under but shipping no water over the bows” Sometimes they had to heave-to and use an oakum-bag filled with oil. The open cockpit, five feet by three feet six, was all the space they had to move about in, and this was often half-filled by breaking seas. A doctor had told them that lack of exercise would affect their health, so they made a habit of “marking time” in the cockpit, three hundred steps each watch.

A lifeboat put out from Storms River (between Algoa Bay and Plettenberg Bay) under the impression that the *Homeward Bound* was in distress. Captain Nilsen followed the lifeboat to the river mouth and accepted a present of a bag of potatoes and onions and some dried fish.

Crowds on the quay welcomed the Norwegians to Mossel Bay. After that came the most severe ordeal of the whole voyage – a mid-winter struggle in gale after gale to reach Table Bay. They were so long at sea that food ran

low, and on some days each man had to be content with a biscuit and a cup of coffee.

“It was hard times on a great many occasions with us, as the food that was not tinned was so injured by damp that at last it became mouldy and uneatable,” wrote Captain Nilsen. “Seas often broke over the side, taking plates, paraffin stove, cook and all to leeward. Our blankets were nearly always wet, and they rotted.”

Often they kept afloat only by baling with buckets. For a fortnight all three men were wet. “Our hands and feet were palsied” noted Nilsen calmly. “Cloud banks were so thick and black that we might well have been lying between high and steep black mountains.”

Again and again they were driven back while attempting to beat round Cape Point. People in Cape Town had given up the *Homeward Bound* as lost, but on July 5 she sailed in safely. One newspaper greeted them in verse:

*Welcome, tiny craft to Table Bay,
We have looked for you for many a day,
Now you have come we all say round,
May God watch over the “Homeward Bound”*

The Cape Argus reported: “Grave fears were entertained that the *Homeward Bound* would never reach Table Bay, as she was twenty-seven days out from Mossel Bay.”

She had lost both her anchors while trying to find shelter in the lee of Hangklip, and improvised bags of sand ballast proved useless as anchors. For a time, however, the trouble of the Norwegians were over. Hundreds of Rogge Bay fishermen hauled the boat to the centre of the fish market. A tent was pitched over her, and Cape Town flocked to hear Captain Nilsen's story – at a shilling a head, as before. Norwegians in Cape Town honoured their fellow-countrymen at a dinner. “We went to sleep dreaming of black squalls and heavy breakers,” recorded Nilsen.

When the *Homeward Bound* put to sea again she was towed out of Table Bay by a tug and escorted by a fleet of small craft. Well-wishers had loaded her with preserved meat, soup, salmon, crawfish, green peas, bacon – food for two and a half months. She had bottled beer, spirits, lime juice and quinine wine was medicine. Nilsen had also taken on fifteen hundred pounds of lead ballast.

It was an easy passage to St. Helena. When they anchored off Jamestown, every ship flew the Norwegian flag and cheered the *Homeward Bound*.

“I tried and succeeded in having the same discipline in this little boat as I had been accustomed to in large ships,” wrote Nilsen. “I never tempted Providence by carrying too much sail. Every Sunday I held Divine Service at 11 a.m., weather permitting, with Bible reading and Moody and Sankey's hymns. The cockpit was scrubbed every morning.”

The ship's library consisted of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, two volumes of Bishop Tegner's poems, Norie's *Epitome of Navigation*, and novels by Marryatt and Sir Walter Scott.

Each fine day they had breakfast at eight – bread, butter and coffee. The slightest spray put the stove out, and then coffee was replaced by lime juice. Olsen was the cook. Dinner at noon consisted of lobscouse, a true sailor's dish of meat stewed with vegetables and ship's biscuit. On Sundays they opened a tin of oxtail, hare or kidney soup as a treat. Tea at six was the same as breakfast, “except on the rare occasions when good fortune sent a fish to the hook or we managed to harpoon a dolphin.”

They ran short of food again before making the Azores, and suffered in the calms of the tropics. Captain Nilsen was navigating with an old-fashioned card compass, an octant, “charts of a sort”, and two watches that became

affected by sea water. The log “ships” had been lost, so he had to guess the distances.

More heavy weather was encountered after refitting at the Azores. “Many a time the hot meat was washed off our plates,” wrote the indomitable Nilsen. Occasionally the boat was followed by hopeful sharks.

Eleven months after leaving Durban the gallant little *Homeward Bound* sailed up the Channel and anchored off Dover. Nilsen summed up: “Month by month through the tremendous rollers of the Atlantic Ocean and against storms and contrary winds she has won her way, not without trial to her timbers and the endurance of her crew.”

Though men have fought the sea nobly in open boats in peace and war since then, the voyage of those three Norwegians in the *Homeward Bound* still stands in a class on its own. Only in the voyages of the ancient Vikings can one find something akin to the patient acceptance of extreme hardship and the magnificent seamanship of the *Homeward Bound's* crew.

The boat was railed to London and exhibited at the Crystal Palace. This set the three men on their feet financially, and Captain Nilsen and his brother were able to return to Norway as passengers. Zefanias Olsen remained in London and prospered. He died in 1930. But to the end of his days he kept

the *Homeward Bound* on the Thames as a pleasure boat – and as a reminder of the hardest experience of his life.

HENRY PALMER had been a diver for fifteen years on the October day in 1904 when he faced his most terrifying underwater ordeal. It occurred at the entrance to Table Bay docks, in only thirty-five feet of water.

The *Dunvegan Castle* had bumped the South Arm Elbow, dislodging huge blocks of concrete and causing £10,000 worth of damage. Day after day Palmer and other divers had been on the bottom, fastening chains to the sunken masonry so that cranes could haul the blocks to the surface. Soon after the work started there had been an incident which had caused a stir among the divers. One of Palmer's mates had been gripped round the leg by an octopus of about average size. This diver had made the mistake of trying to free himself with one hand. The octopus, though no giant, was strong enough to retain a firm hold on the diver's waist and leg, and the diver had to signal for help. Another diver went down and cut the tentacles away. It was a simple rescue.

The octopus is common enough in Cape waters, as every fisherman knows. Duikers and fish feed on small ones; and the larger octopi retaliate by

seizing penguins and duikers and eating them. Palmer was also aware that an octopus with twenty-six foot tentacles had been washed up on Noordhoek beach some years before. Somehow he had not expected to meet a giant of the species in Table Bay Docks. He and his mates treated sharks and small octopi with contempt. Sharks are easily scared by a shower of bubbles from the air escape valve of the helmet. And there is a technique for dealing with a small octopus.

“All you have to do is to look for the parrot-beak of the octopus, thrust your hand in there and turn the creature inside out,” Palmer told me long afterwards. “The octopus is an inquisitive fellow, and stretches out an arm to find out who is invading his territory. Divers know how to handle a small octopus.”

On the day of his ordeal Palmer was stooping over a seven-ton concrete block, working out the right position for the chain. Suddenly he felt his leg being pinioned. The water was clear, and he saw at once that he was in the grip of a huge octopus. “I shook with fright and nausea,” recalled Palmer. “It was like a severe electric shock. I had no knife, and in any case I could never have severed a tentacle of that thickness. Nevertheless, I had enough presence of mind to keep my hands clear. If you resist an octopus it sends out more tentacles and holds you more

tightly. There is also the danger that the parrot-beak will come into play and rip up the canvas diving suit like paper. So I just stood there palpitating and paralysed.”

Palmer, a large and powerful man, had met a monster indeed. He watched it emerge slowly from its lair beneath the concrete block. Before long he saw that he had acted wisely in standing still. Feeling no resistance, the octopus left the concrete and wrapped itself completely round Palmer.

“I saw a chance of escape and tugged the life line, giving the emergency signal,” Palmer told me. “The men on the surface hauled me up fast, so fast that the octopus had no time to hang on to the concrete. That saved my life.”

The diving crew were horrified when Palmer broke surface with the octopus sprawling over him. They had knives and hatchets handy, however, and they pulled Palmer to the ladder. True to grim tradition, the octopus refused to let go. Each tentacle, as thick as a man's arm and with large vacuum cups, had to be hacked and cut. Diver Palmer was exhausted when at last they drew him from that ghastly embrace and unscrewed the heavy helmet.

Then they hauled the dead octopus on to the South Arm and spread out the remaining tentacles. Each tentacle measured eleven feet six inches. Not a record, but larger than any diver wishes to see.

Word of the adventure reached the South African Museum, and they sent for the octopus with the idea of preserving it. There was an anti-climax when it was discovered that Italians working at the docks had hastened to remove their favourite delicacy before a photograph could be taken. Palmer's attacker had become "pilaff of octopus".

Henry Palmer had to take a holiday after that encounter. His hair turned white, but he went on diving for some years. Towards the end of his career at Table Bay Docks he brought up a bag of Portuguese silver coins worth £400. He lived to celebrate his golden wedding, and died twenty years ago.

Modern divers carry a nitric gun when the presence of a large octopus is suspected. The acid-impregnated water will kill any monster. Dynamite has also been used in Cape waters with satisfactory results. Diver Palmer had nothing but his wits-and a good crew on the surface.

CHAPTER 29

ROBBEN ISLAND

ESCAPE is the great post-war theme – escape from captivity or escape from the cities to solitude. In the Robben Island records I have discovered a little-known chapter in the literature of escape.

Prisoners planned escape from Robben Island in the early days of the Cape settlement. Much later came the lepers; and they, too, made their bids for freedom. Lepers were first placed on Robben Island more than a century ago. In the beginning this exile was more or less voluntary; but in 1892 the segregation of lepers became compulsory. That ruling caused unrest and the desire for liberty.

Towards the end of last century Robben Island was a cheerless spot, the leper settlement was overcrowded and uncomfortable. The authorities were considering a scheme to remove the patients to an isolated farm in the Hangklip area; and so year after year passed without sufficient money being voted for the improvement of conditions on the island.

One select committee after another listened to the grievances of the lepers, but it was not until 1931 that the lepers were settled on the mainland. At one time the lepers became so desperate that no high official could visit Robben

Island without being mobbed by these sufferers. “Any change is better than no change”, declared the lepers. The island was a sandy, treeless waste. Early mornings were often misty, it was hot at noon, and a cold wind blew in the evening. The water from boreholes was brackish, gardening was difficult. Their eyes suffered from the glare, and the sea air affected their weak chests. Some of the lepers maintained that they had been tricked into going to the island. They had been promised that after a few months' treatment they would return to their homes, only to find that they were on the island for life. Other lepers asserted that they had been torn handcuffed from their families.

Many relatives of lepers had a horror of the sea; and indeed the crossing in the tiny steamer *Magnet* was sometimes an ordeal. Thus a patient from Malmesbury complained that he had not seen his wife for eleven years. The *Magnet* carried passengers and stores to the island four times a week, though the island was sometimes cut off for six days during heavy weather. Relatives of lepers had their fares to Cape Town and the island paid by the government once every three months.

All the doctors were opposed to lepers remaining on their farms, as the isolation rules were not carried out and fresh cases had been traced back to

lepers “segregated” in this way. One wealthy leper was seen trying on hats in a Cape Town shop. But the most serious allegation made by a few patients was that they were not lepers when they were sent to the island. In two cases it was established that the diagnosis of leprosy was wrong, and the people concerned were set free.

Housing for the lepers was so wretched in the first decade of this century that white and coloured patients often shared the same rooms. Similarly there was no privacy for an educated man touched by this slow scourge; and the schoolmaster found himself dumped among illiterates.

On the credit side, as the island doctor pointed out, the lepers were allowed to roam over three-quarters of the island without restrictions during the daytime. They enjoyed fishing off the rocks. Those who volunteered to work were paid small wages – a male laundryman or tailor earned two pounds a month, a shepherd one pound, a needlewoman ten shillings. Assistant cooks, dressers, sanitary workers, tree planters and painters were lepers.

Sometimes the disease ran its course or became arrested, so that a patient was no longer contagious. Such patients were allowed to return home. Nevertheless, some asked to be allowed to remain on Robben Island.

Twice a day a wagonette drove round the island, and the lepers looked forward to these drives. Trades and hobbies were encouraged, and the lepers were allowed to build little huts where they gained the privacy they desired. On an island littered with wreckage from lost ships there was ample material for these shelters. They were free until ten o'clock at night, when every leper had to be in his ward or cubicle.

Nevertheless it was a grim life, and many lepers found that their homesickness was more distressing than the incurable disease which had sent them to the island. Most of the patients were from the country districts, and they could never understand why they were not allowed to live on farms.

A special leper police force of twenty men patrolled the island, watching the compounds by day and the beaches by night. In spite of their vigilance, lepers were reported missing from time to time. The main problem of the escapers was to build a boat without being detected. Robben Island was never an Alcatraz, and a man with a boat had a reasonable chance of launching it unobserved one dark night and pulling across to Blaauwberg Strand four miles away. Boat after boat was found and seized by the police, sometimes after the

lepers had worked for many weeks selecting and shaping the timbers and hoarding canvas for the covering.

Four lepers overcame this difficulty by building a hut with a secret room under the wooden floor. There they worked undisturbed. One of them made the fatal mistake of boasting about their ingenuity, however, and the police soon heard of the secret room.

Three young lepers who evidently knew how to keep their mouths shut went fishing every day along the rocky northern coast of the island. This part was not guarded as carefully as the beaches, for escape through the rocks, where the sea beat heavily, was regarded as impossible. While one man fished (keeping a sharp look-out), the others built a coracle of wood and canvas. Each afternoon this frail craft was buried in the sand, until at last it was ready for sea.

Patiently the three lepers waited for one of those rare nights, which occur; perhaps, three times a year, when the ocean is smooth as a lake. Then they left their ward when everyone was asleep, dodged the guards, and launched the coracle. The first man slipped on the rocks as he was stepping into the coracle, fell heavily and dropped into the water. By the time his companions had rescued him the coracle had drifted out to sea. All three men regained their ward without being observed, but the man who had fallen had been injured and had to ask for treatment. He

never gave his companions away, though the whole island talked for days of the attempted escape.

Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, Governor of the Cape, visited Robben Island in July 1909 to inspect an exhibition of leper hobbies. He was introduced to many leper characters, including some determined escapers. One was a man named Walsh, who had built a boat, had it seized by the police, and had stolen it back before it could be broken up. Walsh got clear away to the mainland, where he had a spell of freedom before being sent back to the island. Another leper, Snell, had not been so fortunate. He had paddled away from the island on a raft of empty cement-barrels, but the sea swept him ashore again and he was caught.

There was an ex-officer who had served for eighteen years in a famous British regiment. He exhibited flowers, cultivated in spite of setbacks. Discipline was still strong in him, and he had never tried to escape.

Hero of Robben Island leper escapers on that great day was a young farmer who had left the island by the simplest method of all. He had arrived with a huge beard, and he was known to all on the island by that beard. So one day just before the island steamer was due to leave he had shaved off his beard, sauntered down to the jetty, mingled with the passengers and departed without arousing the slightest suspicion. He had

spent six months in his own district before the police discovered his presence and escorted him back to the sad isle of lepers.

MR. H. SLOANE, who was Chief Clerk on the island between 1912 and 1920, supplied me with many interesting sidelights on island life and escapes. He told me of two convicts, Silideli and Brand, who broke out at night, went to the jetty armed with crowbars and threatened the sentry. Thus they were able to lower the boat hanging from the davits and escape to the mainland. Silideli robbed and murdered a man at Rosebank, and was hanged. Brand was recaptured and sent back to the island.

“The sentry was fined £5, and he told me that he paid the money gladly, for he would have had his skull cracked if he had resisted the escapers,” added Mr. Sloane.

Some-time later a convict named Jan Christian was reported missing. It was suspected that he was hiding somewhere on the island, and Mr. Sloane organised a search party in which all the officials aided the police. “We formed a line right across the island and combed the whole place,” recalled Mr. Sloane. “It looked as though he had dodged us, but finally he

was discovered under a man-hole cover in the female leper section. The women had been hiding and feeding him.”

On another occasion Mr. Sloane saw a convict with a carbine over his shoulder. The convict explained that the warder at the stone quarry had gone to sleep, and he had taken the carbine to prevent it falling into the wrong hands!

The murder trial which may be unique in South African legal history was held on Robben Island. One of the native lepers had brewed some beer and refused to part with it; so another native leper killed him with a stone.

The trial was set down for hearing on the mainland, but when the judges realised that thirty leper witnesses would have to be brought to Cape Town, they decided to remit the case back to the Robben Island magistrate with increased jurisdiction. The murderer was sentenced to twelve months' hard labour; but as there was no proper jail for lepers it merely meant that he was unable to go fishing during that period.

Living was so cheap on Robben Island before World War I that many European attendants earning seventy-eight pounds a year (with free quarters and rations) found that they were able to marry. Mutton was five-pence a pound, sirloin of beef four-pence halfpenny, and kidneys a penny each. The

island provided free fish, rabbits, quail and partridge. Whisky cost five shillings a bottle, a quart of French champagne ten shillings and beer three-pence halfpenny. Twice a month the island steamer ran as a “shopping boat”, allowing the staff a day in Cape Town to buy anything unobtainable on the island.

In the mental hospital were a number of European criminal lunatics. One of them, an able man apart from his kink, reorganized the island stores at Mr. Sloane's request. Harmless lunatics were employed as servants in many island homes.

There were characters among the attendants in the old days, and men who had come down in the world found Robben Island a fairly pleasant refuge. One member of a titled family had been a medical student, but had failed his final examinations. He became an attendant at the mental hospital. Once a month he went over to the mainland, carrying a leather case and dressed for the highest social circles. He gave the impression that he was a member of the medical staff, and spent a month's pay in a day.

Another attendant of half a century ago resigned and suddenly became the owner of a flourishing business not far from Cape Town. It was surmised on the island that this man had paid a secret visit to a steamer on the rocks,

shortly before she broke up. A consignment of jewellery, known to have been on board, could not be found by the salvage party.

Among the European lunatics was a woman who had set fire to several churches on the mainland. Though her failing was well known, she twice succeeded in setting fire to the asylum. There was also a man who collected all the odd scraps of metal he could find, hammered and cut them round, milled the edges, and carved Queen Victoria's profile as best he could. In this way he amassed (to his own satisfaction) a small fortune.

Wrecks broke the monotony of island life. When the *Rangatira* was lost in 1916, cargo washed ashore for months and the beaches were strewn with carpets of fur-coats. Lepers broached hogsheads of rum and whisky, and the temptation was too great for some who should have known better.

One of the events of Mr. Sloane's period on Robben Island was the arrival, in 1913, of the first cinema projector. No one knew how to work it, so Mr. Sloane bought a text-book on the subject. "In the morning I would be acting as magistrate, and in the evening I was the bioscope operator," Mr. Sloane told me.

Old documents and reports on the island enabled Mr. Sloane to investigate Robben Island's queer. history. Before a steamer was provided, the link with

the mainland was a five-oared gig manned by convicts. Mental patients were called upon at all hours to unload boats.

Civil and military officers from India (known, owing to their fondness for curry as “chilli grinders”) often visited Robben Island for the shooting and fishing. Troops from India were stationed there to recover their health.

If an emergency arose, a brass six-pounder gun was fired. There was also a semaphore, and late last century a heliograph was provided for communication with Signal Hill. When the cable broke during World War I the island fell back on the heliograph and received war news on sunny days.

Robben Island attracted the earliest Portuguese explorers. It is recorded in the Lisbon archives that one of their ships anchored in a bay named Portugal Cove in 1525, landed convicts who built a stone house. No trace of this house had been discovered, and nothing further is known of this settlement more than four centuries ago.

But always there have been prisoners in the Robben Island picture. The first English attempt to establish a colony at the Cape, in 1614, was a penal settlement on Robben Island; and eight ill-fated convicts were marooned there. One was killed by the Hottentots on the mainland, four were drowned and three who succeeded in returning to England were hanged.

All through the Robben Island story runs the escape theme. Herry, the interpreter, imprisoned on the island by Van Riebeeck, escaped to Saldanha in a leaky boat. In the time of Governor de la Fontaine seven convicts got away in a boat made of sheepskins. A commando searched the beaches to the north of Blaauwberg and recaptured four of them. The others had been drowned in the surf.

Some of the later prisoners could find nothing better than barrels, but that did not stop them. They cast themselves on the mercy of the sea with varying degrees of success.

This is an island which has seen many departures. Only the lighthouse sends out its beam for decade after decade without interruption, only the lighthouse-keepers watch the comings and goings and remain faithful to the island of exiles.

“ROBBEN ISLAND lighthouse speaking – there's a ship two hundred yards from the shore, firing distress signals. No, we can't make her out ... too much fog.”

Captain Stephen, port captain of Table Bay Docks, put the telephone down and ordered the tug *T. E. Fuller* away to the rescue. But no one imagined that the ship which had grounded on the north-west corner of the island was the fine mail steamer *Tantallon Castle*. No regular mail steamer on the Cape run had ever been wrecked in Table Bay. Not one has been lost in Table Bay since May 7, 1901 – the *Tantallon's* unlucky day.

Captain de la Cour Travers of the *Tantallon* had sailed as master of ships for twenty-seven years. He had been officially commended for bringing the first released slaves from Zanzibar to Durban. When ships were in distress outside Durban during a heavy gale he rendered such assistance that a gold watch was presented to him by public subscription.

He was entrusted with the R.M.S. *Trojan* when the Empress Eugenie was a passenger. As captain of the famous twin-screw Scot he had made a round trip under one engine after an engine room explosion, and the owners had rewarded him with a gift of plate. But that message from Robben Island meant the end of a distinguished career.

The *Tantallon* was a popular ship, only seven years old, with a single funnel and three masts. There were one hundred and twenty passengers on board in three classes, the first class being aft according to custom.

All that last day there had been low, intermittent fog, and Captain Travers had never left the bridge. He had reduced speed from fifteen knots to “dead slow”, stopped occasionally for soundings, and posted an able seaman at the masthead. That was about all that a shipmaster could do in the days before echo sounding, radar, wireless direction finding and modern foghorns. Captain Travers had to rely on dead reckoning, which gives ample scope for fatal errors.

At three fifteen that afternoon the *Tantallon* was doing six knots when the second officer sighted a mass of seaweed – a clear indication of land close at hand. Captain Travers rang “full speed astern”. Too late. The ship grounded so gently that many people on board could not feel the impact. All round there was dense fog, a calm sea and a deadly calm in the air.

With despair in his heart Captain Travers swung out and provisioned his lifeboats and fired his saluting cannon.

At the Robben Island jetty the tiny steamer *Magnet* was about to leave for Table Bay Docks with passengers and cargo. Captain Olsen of the *Magnet* put his passengers on shore and steamed in the direction of the distress signals. Olsen had the island whale-boat in tow. When he saw the *Tantallon* he realised that his decks would soon be crowded, and he threw his own

cargo overboard. First he took the women and children on board the *Magnet* and landed them at the docks. Then he steamed back to the *Tantallon* and took off most of the remaining passengers – all but a few who had decided that they would be more comfortable on board the doomed mail steamer.

There had been no panic. The four stewardesses were praised for setting a splendid example. Among the passengers were Sir Henry McCallum,¹¹ the new Governor of Natal, and twenty nurses who were urgently needed at the Cape Town plague camp. After the ship had grounded passengers went to their saloons and had afternoon tea as usual.

Harbour tugs put their lines on board the *Tantallon* that evening, but could not move her. Next day they were joined by the *Braemar*, *Avondale* and *Raglan Castle* and H.M.S. *Tartar*. Mails and some of the baggage and cargo were salvaged, but it soon became obvious that the *Tantallon* was finished. A heavy swell came up, water entered the engine-room and within a few days the ship had broken in half.

¹¹ One of the *Tantallon's* officers informed me recently that there would have been no shipwreck if Sir Henry McCallum had not been anxious to keep an appointment in Cape Town. Colonial governors were important personages in those days – and Captain Travers lost his ship in the effort to make port in time.

Baggage was heaped round the Clock Tower at Table Bay Docks, and there the passengers rummaged hopefully for their possessions. A rescued canary sang in its cage. Some of the passengers had been given cabins in the mail steamer *Saxon*, others had found rooms in hotels.

The court of inquiry into the wreck was held in the Oddfellow's Hall, Loop Street, with Mr. G. Blackstone Williams as chairman and a naval officer and two master mariners as assessors. Sir Henry Juta, K.C., appeared for Captain Travers and the owners.

Evidence revealed that a strong north-east set in the current towards Robben Island had upset the dead reckoning. The verdict was against Captain Travers. The Court held that he should have steered a course farther to the west and stopped when the sounding gave forty-two fathoms.

“Guilty of a grave error of judgment and censured,” was the finding. Captain Travers was allowed to retain his master's certificate, however, “owing to his long and meritorious service”. No blame attached to any of his officers. And, of course, the Court pointed out the urgent need for a fog signal on Robben Island.

Five days after the grounding of the *Tantallon*, the freighter *Hermes* dragged her anchor in a north-west gale and was wrecked beyond Milnerton. Two

women were drowned when one of her lifeboats capsized. Thus the people of Cape Town had the mournful spectacle of two ships breaking up in Table Bay. For decades the bones of the *Hermes* showed above the surf.

Cape Town merchants lost a great deal of valuable cargo in the *Tantallon*, but on Robben Island there were more pleasant sequels. Baskets and square hampers of eggs from Madeira floated ashore. The eggs were found to be edible, and some were hatched on the island. Customs officials camped on the island and took charge of other flotsam – dresses, haberdashery, pots, pans, bicycle tyres, even silver teapots. After their departure, however, the island people gathered all the firewood they needed for years. Much good teak from the wreck was converted into furniture.

A party of lepers built a crude boat from the *Tantallon's* timber. It was found complete and hidden in sand. The lepers were only waiting a favourable day for escape. The discovery was lucky for the lepers, as they would certainly have been drowned in such a craft.

At an auction held in Cape Town, the remains of the *Tantallon* were knocked down for two hundred and fifty pounds. In the “ships' cemetery” along the western shore of Robben Island you can still see fragments of the *Tantallon*, jumbled with smashed relics of later wrecks.

Not a life was lost when the *Tantallon Castle* was abandoned. It was a tragedy only for Captain de la Cour Travers, who returned to England as a passenger and never sailed again in command of a fine ship.

CHAPTER 30

CHRISTMAS IN CAPE TOWN

YOU can thank *The Cape Argus* (probably aided by Charles Dickens) for Christmas as we know it in Cape Town. It was a slow growth, but one that can be traced easily enough in the newspaper files.

Book after book by Charles Dickens, filled with the Christmas spirit, had been arriving in Cape Town during the 'forties and 'fifties of last century. Yet it was not until 1859 that any Cape Town newspaper thought of wishing its readers a Merry Christmas. There was no Christmas shopping rush, because the custom of giving presents had not become widely established.

Thus, during the week before Christmas in 1859, only two advertisements with a Christmas flavour appeared in the *Cape Argus* – one suggesting French flower vases as presents, the other offering Westphalia hams for the Christmas dinner.

On December 24 that year the Cape Argus came out with a leading article discussing Cape Town's apathy and pleading for a new outlook. "In accordance with the genial and time-honoured custom of Old England, we wish our readers A MERRY CHRISTMAS," said *The Argus*. "It must be confessed that in the Southern Hemisphere, with the thermometer standing

at something like one hundred degrees, merriment is not precisely the condition either of mind or body which most readily associates itself with the idea of Christmas. When beef and turkey cannot be coaxed into keeping for longer than one night, and the recollection of plum-pudding is distasteful, and the bare idea of mince pie and brandy throws one into a perspiration – it seems something like an unfeeling mockery to grasp your friend by the hand and hope he may have a merry Christmas.

“Seriously, Christmas at the Cape does lose much of peculiar interest which attaches to it in northern climates. Certain it is that Christmas Day is very lightly regarded here. We hope we shall not be trespassing on very dangerous ground if we plead for the better observance of Christmas, and urge the superiority of its claim to that of the unmeaning New Year's Day. And so we heartily wish our readers a merry and hospitable Christmas; a time for healing social wounds and smoothing down differences; for promoting good offices among themselves, and taking pity on the ignorant and neglected races who can have no sympathy with them in their thankfulness and rejoicing.”

In the same issue the Cape Town Theatre announced the first Christmas pantomime in South Africa. “Christmas will not pass over without an

endeavour to keep up the good old English custom of a good old English pantomime founded on one of the oldest ballads in the language,” advertised Mr. Sefton Parry, proprietor and manager. “An attempt of this kind upon so small a stage, with so many disadvantages to contend against, may seem at first almost impracticable; but Mr. P. trusts to perseverance and determination to ensure success. The scenery, painted expressly for the occasion, is of the most gorgeous description; the masks, properties and tricks are of unusual excellence; and the dresses all that money and good taste could secure.”

The pantomime was “The Babes in the Wood”. It was preceded by Butkstone's celebrated drama entitled “The Rough Diamond”.

During that week in 1859, householders paid thirty shillings for a fattened pig and nine shillings for a sucking pig. A fowl cost a shilling, a turkey four shillings and sixpence and oranges were seven shillings a hundred.

Mr. Robert Granger announced in *The Argus* that three thousand bags of white table rice from Calcutta had just been unloaded and were on sale at his Castle Street store. Lancashire hams, Irish butter and many of the famous cheeses of England and Holland were available. You could buy

Havana cigars and whisky galore. To that extent Cape Town had a more lavish Christmas in the days before Christmas was generally celebrated.

Also in the same issue of *The Argus*, a Cape Town shopkeeper wrote to the editor complaining that if the town was not to be left at the mercy of a horde of drunken ruffians, the police force must be increased in number and physical efficiency. "Today I witnessed a half-drunken navvy defy a constable to take him in custody, and coolly drawing a line in the dust, told the officer if he crossed that line to touch him, he would be his death," related the shopkeeper. "Whatever courage the little constable possessed; he had discretion enough to know he would be nothing in the hands of the stalwart navvy."

CHRISTMAS WAS observed by white men on the shores of Table Bay well before Van Riebeeck's arrival. Master Antony Hippon of the English ship *Dragon* was here at Christmas in 1607; and his men carved one of the earliest English post office stones. They must have felt a long way from home as they filled their water-casks from the Table Valley stream.

Van Riebeeck made no mention of Christmas festivities while he was at the Cape, though he gave his men “each a tankard of Spanish wine” for the New Year.

His successor, Wagenaar, wrote in the journal: “Today Holy Christmas (de Heylige Christyt) was properly celebrated by hearing God's word twice.” On January 2, 1663, Wagenaar added: “Early this morning we put all the mechanics to their work once more, having a sufficient number of holy, or more correctly speaking, dissipation and drink days – may God better it – since last Christmas.”

Slaves were kept at work during these festivities, but many took advantage of the less rigid discipline to escape into the interior. Some were never seen again.

Christmas week of 1705 was stormy, and on Christmas Day “it rained as if the fountains of heaven had opened”. The oldest inhabitant of Cape Town had never seen anything like it. “The land overflowed and the water carried away our sheafs of corn.”

Eight years later the south-caster blew at hurricane force on Christmas Day, and in the bay the English ship *Great London* was straining at her cables and signalling for help. As the Castle did not reply, nineteen men rowed to

the shore in the longboat and were supplied with an anchor and cable. They were blown out to sea, however, and never seen again.

It was on Christmas Day 1769 that the *Duke of Kingston* sailed out of Table Bay with a shipment of remounts for Madras – the first horses ever sent from the Cape to India.

Thunberg was at the Cape a few years later and noted that “the Calvinists do not keep Christmas, and everyone goes about his business as usual, but New Year's Day is kept as a holiday and neighbours all call on each other.”

In a *Cape Town Gazette* published on Christmas Day early last century the judge of Police cautioned the public against “discharging guns or letting off fireworks within one mile of the Town House”. This was really a New Year warning, for Cape Town was always quiet at Christmas.

Donaldson, proprietor of the Round House in 1849, suggested his place for “Christmas merrymaking with skittles, quoits and pigeon-shooting”.

Christmas in 1859, the year of the appeal by *The Argus*, was a “blazing, flaring, scorching, nose-blistering, red-hot week”. The following Christmas brought the most severe south-easter felt for seven seasons. “it has been blowing for a month on end,” reported the *Argus*. “People have had to grind

up two ounces of dirt with every ounce of food put into their mouths. Ships have come into the anchorage, but no matter what intelligence they bring, communication with shore is impossible. But for this roaring breeze, however, we would have fever and cholera here, and by means of the 'Cape Doctor' we live on in health and filth.”

During the Christmas holidays in 1864, *The Argus* reported, the main attraction was a ride in the new Wynberg railway. Five years later the *Great Eastern* was in dock on Christmas Day. Thousands of Cape Town people visited the world's largest ship.

Open-handed diamond diggers from Griqualand came to Cape Town for their Christmas holidays in 1871. They treated everyone so liberally, and gave their friends so many champagne parties, that one newspaper described them as heroes.

Christmas trees appeared in the shops that year. One leading store transformed its whole fancy department into a “Bazaar and Christmas Tree”. Another shopkeeper drew up a special advertisement headed with a woodcut of the Royal Arms. It read: “Oh, Pa! Oh Ma! Do go and pay Mr. Long a visit and buy me some toys – they are so fine, so unique, so instructive. Oh do, dear Pa! We will be such good children hereafter.”

The campaign by *The Argus* was showing results at last. Christmas had come to Cape Town.

CHAPTER 31

LIKE A TREE GROWING

AFTER a day with Mr. William Hugh Paterson I felt that I know more about Hermanus – the town, coast, mountains and veld – than some people who had lived there for years. Mr. Paterson's father was one of the founders of Hermanus. At seventy-eight, Mr. Paterson looks back on a happy career as schoolmaster, town clerk, town councillor and mayor. In the early days he was also prosecutor at the magistrate's court; and during the South African War he commanded the Hermanus Town Guard. Father of eleven children, botanist, curator of the Hermanus wild flower reserve, archaeologist – Mr. Paterson had much to talk about and he has the gift (which not all schoolmasters possess) of imparting his knowledge to others. They call him “Ou Meester”, a title he deserves after more than forty years of teaching. But I do not think W. H. Paterson would be upset if you mistook him for a fisherman. He has a tanned, open-air face with the wrinkles of good humour, and a spare, muscular body. He likes wearing a red jersey and grey flannel trousers.

When Paterson was fifteen the Swedish schooner *Adele* was wrecked on Dyer's Island, and this event gave him his first job. He rowed across the bay

with his father and they found a Customs officer on the beach in charge of the cargo that was washed ashore.

“Can you count?” inquired the Customs man. Young Paterson had passed Standard V. He was taken on, and he spent three months counting pick handles, hatchets, saws, drums of cement and planks from the wreck. One day he cooked a meal of perlemoen for four sea captains on the beach. Captain Roe, who was in charge of salvaging the cargo, held the lease for the Dyer's Island guano and penguin eggs. He invited young Paterson to spend a holiday on the island among the birds; and a souvenir of his holiday in 1888 was a fine chest made from the *Adele's* timber by a ship's carpenter on the island.

Paterson first saw Cape Town in 1890, after an ox-wagon journey from Hermanus to Sir Lowry Pass and a Cape cart ride to town. He had gained a Zonnebloem College scholarship, and he was destined to become a teacher. Zonnebloem College, opened for the sons of Native Chiefs, also trained European catechist-schoolmasters for the various Church of England schools in the Cape. Paterson remained there for more than five years, serving in the Cape Town Highlanders in his spare time. Among the

students he taught at Zonnebloem were three sons of Lobengula, sent there by Rhodes after the Matabele War.

Then, having gained his teacher's certificate, he returned to Hermanus and took charge of the Church School. "My salary was £50 a year, plus £20 for holding extra classes at Hawston," he told me. "I was also entitled to the school fees, and I collected them myself – a penny a week from each child." He devised an unusual method of dealing with truants, placing them in sacks with their heads sticking out. The sacks were hung up in a tree in the school grounds. This proved more successful than canings, and the boy who had once been "hung up" became a regular attendant.

Paterson conducted three services every Sunday. When he had to visit Caledon to see the rector it meant a ride on horseback of twenty-five miles each way. "I would sleep at the rector's house, drink a glass of milk in the morning and ride back to Hermanus in time for school," he recalled.

Hermanus became a municipality in 1904, and Mr. Paterson was appointed town clerk at one pound a month. "Education was more elastic in those days," he recalls. "I could dodge backwards and forwards between the school and the municipal office and do both jobs at once." When the magistrate or the doctor came from Caledon on official visits they expected

Mr. Paterson to take them fishing in the afternoon. Possibly as a result of this “compulsory fishing” he has never made fishing his hobby.

He prefers the veld. Long ago he climbed all those peaks with Highland names round about Hermanus; he began studying the flowers and the relics of the ancients in caves and dunes. Probably his most dramatic botanical experience was the rediscovery of *Orothamnus Zeyheri*, the rare and beautiful protea which is better known as the “Marsh Rose”. More than a century ago the German botanist Carl Zeyher described it as a new species found on the Hottentots Holland mountains. It was thought to be extinct; but in 1913 Mr. E. J. Steer bought two flowering branches from an Adderley-street flower seller.

So the search began for the home of the elusive “Marsh Rose”. Two weeks before the annual City Hall flower show Mr. Paterson climbed Glen Varloch near Hermanus and found a clump of bushes seven feet high on a marshy plateau about two thousand feet above sea level. “It was a secluded spot which must have escaped mountain fires for at least twelve years,” said Mr. Paterson. “I took twenty flowers to the City Hall, and that was the first large exhibit of the ‘Marsh Rose’ ever seen there. I was also able to supply Dr. Marloth with a description of the growth of this rarity.”

In the following year Mr. Paterson brought two proteas to the City Hall. At first sight they appeared to be identical, and leading botanists declared they were both *Protea speciosa* – the fluffy pink and white proteas. Mr. Paterson then pointed out that the *Protea speciosa* had a broad leaf, whereas one of his specimens had a thin, spiky leaf. The botanists agreed that it was a new species, and registered it as *Protea Patersonia*. This was not a find in the remote mountains. Mr. Paterson had picked his new protea on Hoy's Kopie in Hermanus.

Another of Mr. Paterson's discoveries started a botanical controversy that lasted for two years. This was a *leucospermum*, the shrub often called “pincushions”, and the argument was settled in Mr. Paterson's favour. *Leucospermum Patersonii* has taken its place in botanical text-books. His third important find, again on Glen Varloch, was a new erica, and this yellow heath was named *Erica Patersonia*.

During the time when everlasting flowers were exported Mr. Paterson had as many as forty pickers at work in the mountains on his behalf. In one year he packed thirteen thousand pounds of the dried flowers for shipment to Hamburg. This old and lucrative trade collapsed when war came in 1914.

Many years ago Dr. Peringuey of the South African Museum wrote to Mr. Paterson asking him whether there were any Strandloper middens in the Hermanus area. Mr. Paterson replied: "This coast is one continuous kitchen midden from Cape Hangklip to Cape Agulhas." Mr. Paterson's queerest discovery was a bone which he dug out of the Klipkop Cave in Hoy's Koppie. He showed it to General Smuts and to many leading archaeologists. Everyone was baffled. In the end Mr. Paterson offered five pounds to anyone who could explain the use of this oddly-shaped bone as a primitive implement.

They were all on the wrong track. It was not an implement, but a fish bone. "The mystery bone became a mystery fish, because this bone did not belong to any variety of fish caught at Hermanus in modern times," explained Mr. Paterson.

Professor J. L. B. Smith solved the mystery at last. The bone came from the spotted grunter, a tropical fish sensitive to cold and unknown along the Hermanus coast. Yet the Strandlopers had feasted on spotted grunter thousands of years ago. It proved that the seas washing the famous angling rocks of Hermanus were once much warmer than they are today.

One of Mr. Paterson's cave specimens looks like a grooved cucumber in stone. This presented another problem which defeated the experts for a time. It looked as though it might have served as a sinker on a Strandloper's fishing line, but it turned out to be a grindstone for pointing bones.

White ochre used by the Bushmen for their cave paintings has been found in the Klipkop cave. Mr. Paterson thinks that paintings may be revealed when the layers of smoke have been removed. A head with Bushman features, carved from red sandstone, was among the finds in the cave, but much excavation remains to be done.

Mr. Paterson is an authority on the history, place names and folk lore of the Hermanus district. Many tales are told of the origin of the world famous resort (municipal valuation £4,500,000) which, within living memory, was no more than a cluster of fishermen's cottages. But you can rely on the Paterson version, for he heard of the founding of Hermanus from his father and the other pioneers long ago.

In the middle of last century it was just a deserted coastline where people came occasionally to fish. Among them was Hermanus Pieters, a wandering teacher who, surprising to relate, was also a shepherd. He often abandoned one or other of his flocks and pitched his tent in a hollow near the fountain

which is still to be seen opposite the home of Miss Smuts in Hermanus, on the road to West Cliff.

Hermanus Pieters used this place so frequently that already in the early 'fifties people elsewhere on the coast spoke of it as Hermanus Pietersfontein. He was buried in the village, and his descendants are still living in the district.

Along the coast at Harry's Bay lived Michael Henn with his wife, five sons and five daughters. Henn, of German descent, had come from Caledon to supply the farmers with fish. Harry's Bay gained its name from Harry Cruse, a Swedish sailor who had been shipwrecked near Palmiet River mouth. He settled there as a fisherman; and as surnames were not always used by the fisher folk he became known as Harry the Swede, or just Harry Swede.

From time to time adventurous young men crossed the mountains to roam the little-known coastline. Five of them decided to join Henn in his fishing venture at Harry's Bay. That was the way John Paterson of Inverness, Scotland, made his home in this far corner. He had gone to sea as a boy of fourteen, joined the Royal Marines later, and called at the Cape in H.M. frigate *Castor*. After the *Birkenhead* wreck in 1852 the *Castor* was sent back

to the Cape to investigate the loss of the troopship. This time Paterson and Harry Plumridge, an Englishman, made up their minds to vanish.

Plumridge had spent his childhood at Windsor Castle, for his parents had been servants of Queen Victoria. He often told his children stories of his playmate, who became King Edward VII. Paterson and Plumridge worked as fishermen at The Strand for a time; but it was too close to Simonstown, so they moved on. At Bot River a wagon-driver offered them a lift to Harry's Bay. The navy never caught up with them, and in the course of time John Paterson became "Oom Scottie".

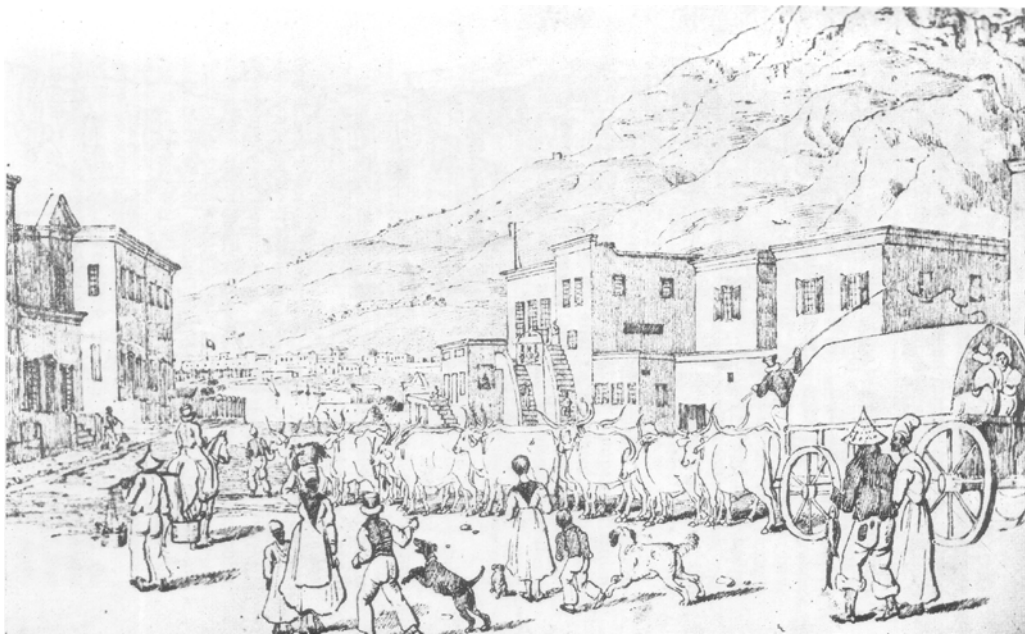
Others who linked up with Henn were a Scot named Thomas Montgomery, James Warrington of Cape Town and John Leff of Poland. What more natural than that the five bachelors should marry the five Henn daughters?

June, July and August are poor fishing months on that coast, so Henn and his sons-in-law filled in the slack season by burning lime two miles to the west of Hermanus Pietersfontein. There are large deposits of perlemoen and limpet shells, and lime is still burnt there. One day the party was setting off in their wagons to burn lime when old Mrs. Henn called after them: "Look out for my lost pig – you must go as far as Hermanus Pietersfontein and search for it."

They searched the cliffs, and as they gazed downwards they saw vast shoals of fish. As a result, Henn made up his mind to move. The whole clan trekked away from Harry's Bay (now Hawston) and thus the first houses rose at Hermanus. Some of them pulled round in an historic boat – the *Nellie*, which had been the captain's dinghy on board the *Birkenhead*. The *Nellie* had made land at Harry's Bay after the wreck, with Dr. Culhane and others on board. Now she was the first boat to enter the old harbour at Hermanus.

That was in 1856. The first child, a Warrington, was born the following year; and not long afterwards there was a wattle-and-daub schoolhouse with an old-fashioned and drunken “meester” in charge. Even in those days Hermanus attracted holidaymakers. The Caledon wheat farmers came at New Year and the Worcester and Robertson wine farmers in March, after the vintage. Mr. Paterson knows this because a Robertson girl was swept away from the beach while bathing. “She would have been drowned, but for my mother – with two babies at home – who swam out after her and caught her by the hair and saved her life,” added Mr. Paterson.

They had hauls of snoek in the early days larger than any seen now. Fish were cured at Hermanus and sent all over the countryside by ox-wagon.



Ox-wagon in one of Cape Town's waterfront streets, with the Castle in the distance.

After 1860 many Caledon families joined the Hermanus pioneers. Daniel du Toit, the Hermans, the Swarts, de Kocks and others settled at the coast. A Dutch Reformed Church was completed in 1878, with a brass-band at the opening ceremony.

Round the village were large farms owned by the McFarlanes, the Pooles of Poole's Bay, Mrs. Agnes Stroud of Raed-na-gael and Glen Varloch. Mr. Walter McFarlane was the first Hermanus fish merchant, and in 1890 he built the first hotel, the Victoria. There was a boarding-house before that, and up to the end of last century the charge was half-a-crown a day. You could have a furnished house for three pounds a month. Those days are over, at Hermanus and elsewhere.

I found a paragraph in *The Argus* of 1889 in which a correspondent put forward the claims of Hermanus as a health resort. There were five hundred inhabitants at that time and good shops. Ten fishing boats were at work, and fish were being sent as far afield as Kimberley. "As much as three hundred pounds is sometimes paid on Hermanus rocks for a day's catch with hook and line," remarked the writer.

It was in 1902 that the people of Hermanus Pietersfontein began grumbling in earnest about the cumbersome name of their village. Some were for

changing it completely to do honour to one or other of the pioneer settlers. The place might have become Hennsville or Patersonia; but while the argument was in progress the local postmaster wrote to the postmaster-general and asked permission to clip the name to Hermanus. This was granted.

Some people are under the impression that the original name was Hermanuspetrusfontein. This came about owing to an error in the rubber stamp used for franking letters at one period. However, the name of the old shepherd and teacher who camped at the spring was Pieters – not Petrus.

Hermanus owed much of its rise to Sir William Hoy, who fished there with Mr. Joel Krige, Speaker of the House of Assembly, forty years ago. Sir William Hoy saw the possibilities and put road motors on the run from Bot River. Thirty years ago the boom started. As you are aware, it is no longer possible to buy seafront plots at Hermanus at five pounds apiece.

“It was like a tree growing,” says Mr. Paterson. “I am glad that I stayed here nearly all my life and watched its progress. My father could not have chosen a more favourable spot than this coastline when he threw in his lot with old Michael Henn a century ago.”

HERMANUS MEANS fish on the tourist map of the world. Franz Klip and other ledges rank with, or above, the great angling rocks of New Zealand, the Californian coast and Florida. And the mightiest fisherman Hermanus ever knew, a world champion indeed, was W. R. Selkirk.

Bill Selkirk first arrived in Hermanus more than thirty years ago. Already an experienced angler, he had taken a light rod to East Africa with him when he went there as a soldier in the First World War. It was his skill that helped to put Hermanus on the angling map. Before long the old professional fishermen were watching him in wonder.

He lived just above the old fishing harbour. Always his long bamboo rod was ready with half a mile of line. He specialized in man-eating sharks, the enemies of the men who make their living by catching fish. Sharks take the fish off the lines. They seldom take the fishermen, but they steal their living. Selkirk the shark killer became a hero in the village; and when sharks entered the bay the look-out men rushed to Selkirk, and always he answered the call.

“Tamaai haai!” Word would go round that Selkirk was playing a large one.

On such a day, back in the nineteen-twenties, you would be lucky to be served in a shop. Not only the holiday visitors but all Hermanus would be down on the rocks watching the battle.

Between the sharks Selkirk would condescend to hook anything from a small hottentot to a record 106 lb. steenbras. But he lived for sharks. Man-eater after huge man-eater he caught and landed. And then, one afternoon in 1922, came Selkirk's greatest hour.

"Tamaai haai!" The old call to battle sounded in the village, and Selkirk rushed down to the rocks with a ten foot six Cape bamboo rod and a seven-inch reel. His line had a breaking strain of 78 lbs., and the end was made fast to a trace with a sealed paraffin tin, six feet of piano wire and two steel hooks. Off the rocks cruised the shark, a huge blue man-eater. Selkirk baited with a six pound fish. At 2.30 that afternoon the shark took the bait. For twenty minutes the tin was entirely submerged, and Selkirk played the shark. Then the shark leapt clear of the water. Selkirk had to follow it along the coast for three hundred yards, over rocks and along the cliff, to prevent the line breaking. It took him five hours to land that shark, and when the end came he beached it in the little fishing harbour.

Selkirk was exhausted, but a cheering crowd set up a tripod and hoisted the shark with block and tackle. A female, it measured thirteen feet three inches in length and it had a girth of eight feet nine inches behind the dorsal fin. It

was impossible to weigh the shark, but a calculation based on the Tuna Club's formula gave an officially accepted weight of 2,176 lb.

Many anglers regard the measurements of Selkirk's shark as a world's record for a shark brought on shore with rod and line. The controversy over that shark filled columns in the newspapers; for some argued that the sealed paraffin tin relieved the weight on the line and disqualified the catch as a record. Selkirk's rivals, however, hooked their sharks from motor-boats in Australian waters, and used the boats and engines to wear their sharks down. Taking a broad view, Selkirk's feat was greater than any motor-boat struggle – and Hermanus still claims the world's record shark.

Selkirk caught more man-eaters after that, at least fifty before he gave up. In later years he felt the strain. One tussle put him to bed for days, and for a month afterwards he was unable to use his right arm.

FAVOURITE LEGEND on the Hermanus coast, of course, is the story of the troopship *Birkenhead* and her gallant soldiers. At the risk of heresy I must point out that the documents I have seen, and the narratives of survivors, do not support Dr. Goodchild's famous poem describing the men standing fast on parade and going down with the ship.

*There rose no murmur from the ranks, no thought
By shameful strength unhonoured life to seek
Our post to quit we were not trained, nor taught
To trample down the weak.*

There is no doubt, of course, that the discipline was splendid. The wreck occurred on February 26, 1852, and the last survivor, Mr. Hugh Todd, died at Barkly East, aged eighty-seven, in 1937.

Fishermen living along the coast near the scene of the wreck declared that the ship remained above the water, supported by the rock, for three days after she struck. The story of the ship sinking inch by inch with the men on parade must be attributed to poetic licence. It is clear, however, that three boats got away with all the seven women and thirteen children on board. The total number involved in the disaster is unknown owing to the loss of the records, but one hundred and ninety-three souls were saved and about four hundred and thirty drowned.

The *Birkenhead* was an iron steam frigate with paddle wheels. Even now she might be recognised on the bottom by the large figure of Vulcan which decorated her bows. She carried six guns. Salvage experts located the sunken wreck of the *Birkenhead* in 1935 about one mile from Danger Point.

There is a legend that the ship carried £250,000 in gold for paying the troops in India, and many plans have been made for the recovery of this treasure. It is probable that the amount of the gold has been over-estimated, for the only official reference to it is found in a letter from the Paymaster-General asking Lieutenant Girardot, a survivor, what had happened to the money for the payment of the forty men under his command. None of the official narratives of the wreck mentioned the loss of a large sum in gold, though many other details of the affair are given. All the ship's papers were lost.

One of the *Birkenhead's* boats, according to local tradition, carried a chest of money away from the wreck. This boat, it was said, was swamped while nearing the rocks, and the money chest remained in an inaccessible position where it could just be seen at low tide. I was present when an attempt was made, financed by a local syndicate, to reach the legendary money chest some years ago. Diver R. Fowley went into the surf at the edge of the rocks at great personal risk and succeeded in reaching "the flat iron box" pointed out to him by fishermen. He emerged with his forehead cut and hands scratched after a severe battering, and declared it was the most dangerous job he had ever tackled.

“What about the treasure?” inquired the eager members of the syndicate.

“There's nothing down there but a square rock, covered with seaweed, that looks very much like a box,” declared the diver. “I searched the whole channel thoroughly, and if there had been anything there I would have found it. And I am glad the job is over.”

No attempt to reach the *Birkenhead* wreck itself has ever been made by divers. The depth of water, however, should not hamper diving operations, as it is recorded that part of the mainmast remained above the surface after the *Birkenhead* settled on the bottom. Several men who clung to the rigging were rescued.

One incident which historians appear to have missed was the manner in which Cape Town first became aware that all was not well with the *Birkenhead*. The ship carried nine horses. Eight swam ashore safely, and one, owned by Cornet Bond of the Twelfth Lancers, trotted back to its old stable. It was there on the second morning after the wreck, having covered one hundred and twenty-five miles from Danger Point to Cape Town.

CLOSE TO Danger Point lies Gansbaai, one of the most isolated fishing villages in the Cape until the sea of sand was crossed by a motor-road in the early nineteen-thirties. Until then it was so remote that one visitor described it as the “Tristan da Cunha of South Africa”. The road distance to Cape Town is 116 miles, but Gansbaai belonged to another, more primitive world.

There have been fishermen in this neighbourhood for over a century. The rich Agulhas Bank, which supplies most of the Union's fish, lies offshore. In 1849 a certain Captain Robert Stanford had a fishing station there, and earned notoriety by supplying fish to the convict ship *Neptune* in Simon's Bay, at the time when the colonists were in revolt against the establishment of a penal settlement at the Cape. Stanford was knighted for his assistance to the government, but boycotted by his neighbours. His name remains at Stanford, fifteen miles from Gansbaai, and Stanford Cove on the coast.

Stanford Cove is a dangerous place to land a boat, so early this century the fishermen moved from there to Gansbaai, a distance of two miles. In 1919 they appealed for a school teacher. The teacher who responded was Mr. Johannes Rudolph Barnard, now a tall, grey-headed, grey-moustached man in the late sixties. Mr. Barnard was my guide to Gansbaai.

He was teaching in the George district at the time of the appeal. He could have transferred to one of several more pleasant places than Gansbaai. “I prayed for guidance and felt the call of Gansbaai,” Mr. Barnard told me. “It was a choice which I have never regretted.”

Accompanied by his wife and three children, Mr. Barnard drove his car to Stanford, left the car there and finished the journey by ox-wagon. There were fifteen households at Gansbaai then – wrecked huts of limestone and thatch on the foreshore. Mrs. Barnard had to lay in a stock of provisions to last three months at a stretch. When the fishermen's supplies of coffee, sugar or candles were exhausted they borrowed from Mrs. Barnard. Mutton and the post came once a week from Stanford. There was no telephone. If an emergency arose, it meant trudging through the sand for over four miles to Danger Point lighthouse.

The most acute problem, however, was the lack of a house for the schoolteacher. One of the fishermen, Philip van Dyk, gave up his own home and moved into a room.

“I went out fishing along the coast every day during my first week at Gansbaai,” recalled Mr. Barnard. “But I caught nothing, and then and there I decided not to encroach on the fishermen's secrets. I never tried to catch a fish again. Nevertheless, I must have fish with my meals. If I find a fishless

menu I have no appetite. I am also fond of the Cape coast shellfish, the mussels and perlemoen, and I have enjoyed many a dish of seaweed jelly.”

For the first sixteen years at Gansbaai, Mr. Barnard conducted all church services, prayer meetings, Sunday schools and funerals. “I studied the people, saw their needs and preached accordingly,” Mr. Barnard told me. “They were simple sermons on honesty, do unto others ...”. The Rev. M. N. van Rensburg visited the village once every two months, but he was only able to call on weekdays. Six years after Mr. Barnard's arrival, Gansbaai had a church hall and a water scheme with a reservoir half a mile away. Some improvements had been carried out to the rough slipway where the men landed their boats.

One of the greatest hardships was the lack of medical facilities. Doctors were called in from Hermanus and Caledon from time to time, but owing to distance each visit cost twelve to sixteen pounds. “I saw it was my duty to assist, and fortunately I had read a number of medical books,” said Mr. Barnard. “The people had great confidence in me and my medicine chest. I saw forty patients safely through the measles epidemic in 1925, in spite of complications such as inflammation of the lungs and stomach. I set broken arms and legs. All the trials of a general practitioner came my way, and

often I was given no rest at night. Sometimes it would be a baby with nothing more than insomnia; or a case of stomach trouble that needed nothing more than a pinch of bicarbonate of soda. At other times there would be difficult confinements, when the old unqualified midwife called on me for help.”

“I always realised my own limitations, but the Gansbaai people did not. One day, when I knew a doctor was visiting the village, two women brought their sick children to me. I pointed out that medical aid was available and sent them away. They waited until the doctor had gone and brought the children back to me. In recent years I arranged for a doctor to visit Gansbaai once a month and persuaded the people to support this system.”

“Fortunately Gansbaai is a very healthy place. I think the lime in the water has something to do with it. No one suffers from rheumatism – my wife had it when we first went there, but it left her. The fishermen are a long-lived community, and they do not become senile in their old age, even when they are over ninety.”

Among Mr. Barnard's early tasks was the housing problem. He felt that it would be impossible to raise the standard of living at Gansbaai until the fishermen owned their own homes. In 1916 the Government had bought the land on which the

fishermen's shacks stood, and they were paying eight shillings a month rent for each plot. Mr. Barnard laid out a new village and arranged with the Government for the sale of plots at fifteen pounds apiece on condition that decent houses were built. The scheme was a success, and today the community has grown from the original fifteen families to nearly two hundred. Mr. Barnard became chairman and secretary of the village management board. Gansbaai now has an hotel, a boarding-house, post office and cinema.

No longer is the village isolated. Government engineers at first estimated the cost of a road through the dunes from Stanford to Gansbaai at eleven thousand five hundred pounds; but Mr. Barnard challenged the estimate and offered to build the road himself for less than half the estimate. He was not called upon to prove his words. The road was built, and it cost four thousand five hundred pounds. There was also a need for a road from the beach to the village. Mr. Barnard organised this work himself. Parts were built by Mr. Barnard and his pupils. He persuaded each man to construct a section in front of his own home. Thus the great loads of fish came more easily to the market.

During Mr. Barnard's years at Gansbaai there has not been a single fishing tragedy, though the men have to endure all the dangers and vicissitudes of the sea in open

boats. In 1942 a boat was capsized by a “sea monster” (probably a whale) and lost, but all the men were picked up.

When Mr. Barnard retired from teaching at the end of 1943 he was appointed a governor director of the Fisheries Development Corporation – the board set up by the State to improve and control the Union's fisheries. He served on the board until 1950. Such is Gansbaai and the man who gained so much for the fishermen that he became known as “King” Barnard. Apart from his official duties, he intends to remain at Gansbaai for the rest of his life. “It is so peaceful, so healthy,” he confided to me. “No other place would agree with me now.”

CHAPTER 32

FOUNDER OF THE OCEAN TAVERN

WHAT sort of man was Jan van Riebeeck? You might think that a character who kept a copious and vivid diary for the first decade of the Cape's three centuries would have left strong and unmistakable clues to his personality. In some ways he did. Yet there are now two schools of thought about Van Riebeeck, and certain modern historians beg to differ from the earlier view – the picture of the kindly and heroic Commander given to us by uncritical teachers in our schooldays. Apart from the riddle of his character, Van Riebeeck left a number of minor mysteries for historians to debate. Where exactly and when did he land on the shores of Table Bay? Is the portrait of Van Riebeeck in the City Hall a genuine likeness? Did he ever sit in the so-called Van Riebeeck chair? Was the journal his own work?

First the man himself. It is on record that after nine years' service in the Dutch East India Company, first as surgeon, then as clerk, he was dismissed for a breach of the regulations – private trading. He had built up the trading station of Tonkin to an outpost of great value in the China Seas, however, and there can be no doubt about his ability. Two years later he was given a second chance. This was his appointment as “head of the Table Valley station” at a salary of four pounds

eleven shillings and eight pence a month. He had to wait three years before it was raised to seven pounds ten shillings.

After only one year at the Cape we find the indomitable Van Riebeeck petitioning for a transfer! The worries and dangers of exile in the far outpost were preying on his mind, and he looked forward not to a successor, but to a “deliverer”. So he wrote to the directors: “We must humbly and respectfully pray that you may now think of our removal and promotion to a better and more honourable position in India ... Here nothing else is required but to barter cattle and sheep, which requires no great cleverness.” Again and again during his ten years at the Cape, Van Riebeeck repeated this request, until finally it was granted.

There is clear evidence that Van Riebeeck was inclined to reach for the bottle when depressed. Once he came to blows with a corporal on board ship. On another occasion he quarrelled with a drummer at a picnic. The Commander of the settlement would never have behaved in such an undignified manner if he had been sober.

He was also treacherous. When he heard there was a French ship in Saldanha Bay, he invited the captain to visit Table Bay as there was no conveyance by which fresh meat and provisions could be sent to Saldanha. The motive behind this false hospitality was to induce the French crew to

desert, thus crippling a competitor. Even the apologetic Theal could not stomach this episode, for he wrote of Van Riebeeck: “He was religious after the fashion of the day, but his religion did not prevent him from acting falsely and treacherously whenever there was any immediate gain to the company to be made by a falsehood or a treacherous act.”

Van Riebeeck has been regarded as a good South African and a visionary in regard to the development of the hinterland. In fact, he wished to isolate the Cape Peninsula by cutting a canal between Table Bay and False Bay. And if he had been allowed to have his way, he would have swamped the Table Valley settlement with Chinese labourers, thus leaving another problem to posterity: Theal summed up: “A more dutiful servant no government ever had. He was sanguine in temperament, energetic in action. On the other hand his judgment was weak and his ideas of justice were often obscured by the one object ever present in his mind – the gain of the honourable company. On that his hopes of advancement were based, and he was ambitious.”

Dr. Louis Leipoldt was a more admiring biographer. He looked upon Van Riebeeck as a great administrator, “perhaps one of the greatest the Cape has ever had”. Nevertheless, there are serious blots on the old-fashioned,

romantic picture. Van Riebeeck's fame does owe something to the fact that he was the first commander of the little refreshment station which grew into the Union of South Africa.

Where did Van Riebeeck land? Certainly not at any of the places where his bronze statue has stood. The keel of the *Dromedaris* probably rode farther inshore than the present circus at the foot of Adderley Street, and Van Riebeeck still had to make a boat journey to reach the shore.

Sir George Cory, the historian, worked it all out with the aid of the earliest Table Bay charts. He placed the historic landing spot somewhere on the present Grand Parade. That is about as close an estimate as it is possible to make after three centuries. On what day of April should the Van Riebeeck anniversary be observed? Ceremonies at the statue have always been held on April 6, and that is regarded as the date of Van Riebeeck's landing. In fact, it is the date that the *Dromedaris* and her consorts reached Table Bay. Van Riebeeck certainly did not land that day, though he sent two officers on shore to find out whether an enemy had seized the virgin valley. They were put on to a beach behind the Lion's Rump, peeped round the corner, and returned to announce that the coast was clear.

Next day Van Riebeeck visited the shore, and on April 8 he landed a hundred men with tents and stores. They remained on shore. When the first century was celebrated, the date selected was April 8, 1752. It was not until April 24 that Van Riebeeck and his family gave up the comfort of the *Dromedaris*, such as it was, for the primitive Table Valley settlement.

Van Riebeeck himself chose April 6 as the day to be set aside by future generations for thanksgiving and prayer. The idea came to him two years after the founding of the settlement, and he recorded his wish in detail in the *Journal*. When the town was two centuries old, the Church authorities decided to follow Van Riebeeck's guidance, and April 6, 1852 was the day when special services were held.

Now the portrait. Probably you have seen this aged oil-painting on the wall of the council chamber in the City Hall. It reveals a sword-belted dignitary with hair falling over the forehead and shoulders under a broad-brimmed hat. He wears a square cut linen collar, and the right hand rests on a walking-stick. The feature of this portrait which has caused so much controversy is the moustache. If you remember the portrait as it was up to 1943 you may recall that the moustache pointed upwards, cavalier fashion.

For more than a century this portrait hung in the Town House in Greenmarket Square. When the Burgher Senate drew up an inventory for submission to the British authorities in 1806 it was listed as: “Ein Schildery het Portrait van Gouvr. van Riebeeck.”

For decades the portrait was accepted at its face value. It was “restored” from time to time by artists who merely confused the issue when the identity of the sitter came up at last for discussion.

Towards the end of last century an obviously genuine portrait of Van Riebeeck by Dirck Craey was presented to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. When photographs of this portrait reached the Cape, it was observed that the features were somewhat different from the Town House portrait. The moustache drooped.

One authority after another then denounced the Town House portrait. Leibbrandt the archivist declared: “Van Riebeeck must have had a very handsome face, but in the Town House counterfeit he appears to be anything but that.” Leibbrandt searched the archives for further evidence, and decided – for no known reason – that the Town House portrait was that of Simon van der Stel. So the portrait remained under a cloud for half a

century, and it was not until Sir Percival David and Professor Edward Roworth carried out a careful investigation that the mystery was solved.

Sir Percival David put himself on the right track by consulting the letters of Johanna Maria van Hoorn, granddaughter of Van Riebeeck, who called at the Cape in 1710 on her way from the East Indies (where she was born) to Holland. She made it her business to get in touch with people who had known her famous grandfather. "There seems to be a great liking for our family," she wrote. "I have met a blind old Hottentot woman named Cornelia, one called Dobbletje and a third Vogelstruys who all wish to tell me about that time."

Some weeks later she added: "An old black woman has been to see me who says that she was one of my late grandmother's slaves, and that she had nursed father and all the other children. Her name is Ansiela. She is married to a Dutchman, and her daughter is Mrs. —. In her house hang the portraits of our late grandfather and grandmother."

Professor E. C. Godee Molsbergen, who used the letters in his book on Van Riebeeck, suppressed the name of Ansiela's son-in-law to avoid offending descendants who might be unaware of a coloured ancestor. It is clear enough, however, that Johanna van Hoorn recognized her grandfather in the

portrait; and it is reasonable to suppose that this was the portrait which found its way to the Town House.

What about the moustache? In 1943 Sir Percival David and Professor Roworth were granted permission to remove the portrait from its frame. Solvents were applied, first to a corner, and the original seventeenth century pigment (which resists solvents) was exposed. Under the magnifying glass it became obvious that some early nineteenth century artists had repainted the mouth and cheeks. This painting was removed by experts, and the drooping Van Riebeeck moustache was disclosed at last.

So the Town House portrait was genuine after all, and authorities now agree that it bears a strong resemblance to the Rijksmuseum portrait. The early Cape artist was certainly no Rembrandt, but that he achieved a likeness there is no doubt. It is a relief to find that Cape Town possesses an authentic portrait of its founder.

Unfortunately it is impossible to take the same view of the “Van Riebeeck chair”, traditional seat of the mayors of Cape Town since some unknown date last century. The origin of this chair is a mystery. Inventories of the Town House furniture compiled in 1795 and 1840 make no mention of it. Experts declare that it cannot be of seventeenth century manufacture.

It has a carved escutcheon of Van Riebeeck suspended from “cabled Anchor of Hope”; but this (like the engine-turned knobs) may have been added in fairly recent years. The whole stinkwood chair may, in fact, be less than a century old.

Yet according to legend this is the chair used by Van Riebeeck when he presided at meetings of his council. Leibbrandt the archivist searched for evidence and finally rejected the claim that the mayoral chair had ever been in the possession of Van Riebeeck. He discovered, however, that the library and furniture of the Hon. George Wood, M.L.C., of Grahamstown (who died in 1884) had been sold by auction in England; and that among the furniture was a chair said to have belonged to Commander van Riebeeck.

Finally there is Van Riebeeck's Journal, the *Dagregister* about which doubts have been raised. There are three copies, one in the Cape Archives, another at The Hague and the third in Batavia.

This mighty work was published by a Dutch historical society late last century, and nothing of importance was omitted. Leibbrandt prepared an English summary. The material is there without poring over the original manuscript; and many students have wondered whether Van Riebeeck could have been closely associated with such an impersonal narrative.

Van Riebeeck certainly did not write the diary himself. Handwriting experts had no difficulty in settling that point. Yet there are incidents which no one but Van Riebeeck could have described; for he was not invariably accompanied by a secretary.

Thus the real Van Riebeeck emerges here and there. The long official record is not without human touches. Dr. J. A. Verhage, author of a thesis on Van Riebeeck, has quoted an adventure off Robben Island, when Van Riebeeck nearly lost his life, in support of his belief that the *journal* was mainly the Commander's own work. Van Riebeeck, the man, thanked God for his deliverance in such terms that the authorship is unmistakable. The secretary merely made the copies.

Van Riebeeck's coat of arms, as I have mentioned, is found in the centre of Cape Town's armorial bearings – the three familiar golden rings or annulets on a red field. It was in 1804 that Commissioner de Mist granted this coat of arms at the request of the Burgher Senate. De Mist added one or two ideas of his own, the black anchor and its background of gold to suggest Cape Town's prosperous future.

High officials feasted at the Town House when the coat of arms was presented. De Mist finished his speech with the words: “Long flourish the

Batavian Volksplanting at the south end of Africa. Eternal good luck to Riebeeckstad!” It came too late. The conservative burghers did not take the hint, and not many of today's citizens, I imagine, would favour changing Cape Town's name to Riebeeckstad.

Cape Town had several other names before it settled down to its appropriate modern form. Van Riebeeck's men felt the need of a name, and an early chart of the settlement bears the words: “whose name we are awaiting the masters to give.” The masters in Holland were concerned only with trade, not titles, and remained silent. It is clear, however, that the settlers called it De Kaap, or “the town at the Castle”; and Mr. Graham Botha, authority on place names, writing about thirty years ago, found that many country people were still referring to the city as “De Kaap”.

Another old form used by the Dutch colonists was Cabo de Goede Hoop, or simply Cabo. Eighteenth-century documents also mention “het Caabse Vlek”, the Cape village. The Castle had its official name of Good Hope, while Table Bay and Table Valley were known to the world's seamen. Yet more than a century after Van Riebeeck's landing the town was still being referred to in official correspondence as “den Caabsen Uithoek” – the Cape outpost.

Kaapstad appears to have become established two centuries ago, in the time of Ryk Tulbagh. Documents in the archives show that Cape Town (two words) was the form preferred by the Chamber of Commerce and other public bodies early last century. Strange to say, the municipality chose Capetown (one word) and stuck to it officially until ten years ago.

Anton Anreith carved the Van Riebeeck armorial bearings granted by De Mist, embellishing his work with flags, cannons, gunpowder barrels and cannon balls. This fine piece of timber is to be found in the City Hall library. Cape Town has never forgotten its founder. All through the story runs the influence of Van Riebeeck, the man who built the half-way house that still links East and West after three centuries, unchallenged as the ocean tavern.

THE END

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